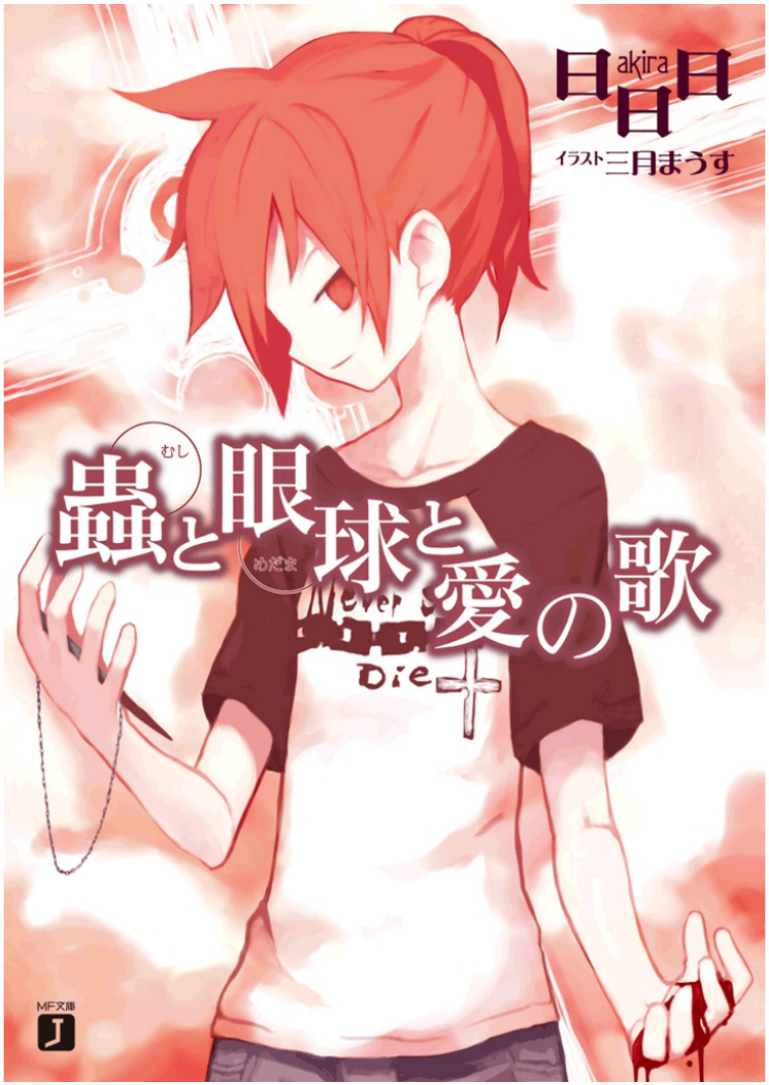
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Mushi, Eyeball and Lovesong

Overture: 700

He had been betrayed.

He was nailed to a great tree with countless stakes like a pitiable insect that had been pierced through. The pain had long gone, and he had no more blood left to shed. Slowly, he stopped feeling the coldness of the chains wrapped around his entire body.

This place, where cause and effect had been corroded, had forever ceased to change. The sun no longer gave it warmth, and even maggots and flies bypassed this land without noticing it. The air was stale as ever. Only time, meaningless time, crawled ever onward.

The poison named loneliness was dissolving him from within, crumbling him from within. After one hundred days of imprisonment, he swore to fulfill any wish of the person who freed him. After a hundred months, he swore to fulfill any three wishes of his liberator. After a hundred years, he swore to fulfill any number of wishes, whatever they may be.

“In conclusion, your idea is very inefficient, Kirigirisu.”

“Kudan, you seem to lack the talent to enjoy life.”

“So it’s best to call little Shinzō Ukako as Kako.”

“It’s more deceiving to call little Gankyū Eguriko as Guriko. Don’t you think that’s excellent?”

“Right. Is Guriko still following us?” “Looks like it.” “How troublesome.” “Very troublesome.”

After a hundred days, he almost succumbed to madness. After a hundred months, he became tired of madness. After a hundred years, his heart had already become as still as that of a plant.

Two mysterious travelers appeared when he had already fallen into despair, having even given up on thinking. Have been imprisoned here, immobile, for innumerable years, his mind was no longer working and he tottered on the edge of death.

“… Did you hear someone?” “Oh? We’re the only ones here apart from insects and birds – God is the only other person here.”

They were two very odd travelers and did not seem to be normal humans. They efficiently laid out wooden branches and lit their campfire in the deepest bowels of the verdant forest that refused human entry, and sat around the fire and chatted casually.

One of them was a man dressed in bright green from head to toe.

The other was a bold Buddhist nun with a giant eyeball on her forehead.

The mysterious duo who called each other Kirigirisu and Kudan did not notice his presence, just like every other organism.

The duo, whose figures were painted crimson by the light of the fire, were still conversing.

“Say, Kirigirisu, have you heard of something like this?”

“What? Kudan, you always sound so boring. Please get on with it.”

The man in green mocked the three-eyed nun. As if unwilling to ruin the moment, the nun closed her two human eyes and only kept the eye on her forehead open: “… This so-called world – ”

“Woah. It’s this kind of grandiose and boring topic again!”

“This so-called world – is me.”

The nun ignored the man and muttered. The Buddhist frock she wore was stained with something that could be either mud or blood and was rather dirty. Such an odd traveler. One couldn’t help but wonder if she was even human. Was she a god, a Buddha, an oni, a yōkai? Or was she an illusion that his mind, tired of this endless solitude, had conjured up?

The nun called Kudan slurred her words as if she were licking something: “People like us have lived a long time, and we are able to see all sorts of things. We have much knowledge and have met many people, and more or less understand the world. However, Kirigirisu – what is the World?”

“Oh? Aaa – it’s rather bothersome for us to consider such things. The world – isn’t it just this?”

Kirigirisu casually grabbed a handful of dirt from the earth and flung it at the nun.

Whoosh – incredibly, the dirt passed right through the nun's body. Did she dodge it? Or were they really just illusions?

"… hey, don't dodge."

"Of course I'll dodge. It'd dirty my clothes otherwise… So the world that you speak of is only a part of the world. Is the world the ground? The sky? Nature? Or cities? If everything within this planet is the world, that is still only a part of the world. The World – is only what we can feel and manipulate. For example…"

In the blink of an eye, Kudan suddenly turned her head and stared at one location.

"For him, who was sealed there, the so-called world - is only the narrow space around him."

…

"The world that you can recognize, the world that is centered on yourself - that seems to be what we consider as the world." He looked up, startled. Kudan continued nonchalantly and he couldn't tell if she had noticed this. "The world is indestructible, an imperishable bastion guarded by God. It is perfect and invincible - that's an illusion we often have. However, Kirigirisu, it's simple for me to just erase your world." Kudan slowly stretched out her hand and covered up Kirigirisu's eyes. "… I can't see anything anymore." "See. The world disappeared." Kudan took back her hand, smiled as if she just pulled a prank, and recovered her original pose. "At the beginning, God said 'Let there be light'. Then there was light, and Heaven and Earth were created. Do you understand what that means? It's not something incredible. It's not something only God can accomplish. We are doing it all the time."

The giant eyeball on her forehead suddenly blinked forcibly.

"If you close your eyes, then the world will end. Although there is still sound and scent, those will also disappear when you fall asleep. Then, if you did this - if you open your eyes and say 'let there be light', then light would come into your world."

Kudan stretched out her arms and continued to speak as if explaining something.

"Then we were able to understand the existence of heaven and earth. We could then feel the ocean, wind, animals, plants, learn to

differentiate the people around us as parents, lovers… God said 'let there be light' at the beginning, then He created heaven and earth, and finally made humans."

Kudan smiled silently and said this softly. She seemed to be recounting to someone, yet at the same time silently and meaninglessly muttering to herself.

"Do you understand? What God is doing is the same as what humans are doing. Every day that we wake up, we are creating heaven and earth, experiencing endless annihilations and rebirths. Then night falls, and we are enveloped by darkness – the world would then disappear. God is the same as me. The World is also the same as me."

Then – Kudan once again pointed at him. "Then, exactly which part of our body created the world? It's simple – it's the brain. The brain is our core, just like the core of God is the core of the world. If the brain cannot comprehend the world, then the world would not be born even if there is light –"

As she threw more branches into the cracking fire, she looked at him with pity in her eyes.

"The brain of God - the World will disappear if you disappeared. Therefore, please bear with it a little longer, just a little longer. You are the organ with which God created everything. You are His brain."

He wanted very much to disappear. He was tired of living, and had enough of thinking. He didn't want to stay in this world for even one second longer. However -

"Seven hundred more years."

The bizarre nun gently spoke to him of the existence of hope: "Seven hundred more years - then you will be released. Although we are travelers who are torn from the world and are not within the loop of cause and effect - but we also obtained the power to stand separate from such things and look down upon this world as a whole… Anyways, seven hundred years is only the blink of an eye. Pass that time with singing, if you wish."

She spoke these words with a smile. Kirigirisu, who was falling asleep and almost ignored her words, asked with incomprehension: "…Who have you been talking to all this time, Kudan? Someone

who talks to herself will look gloomy and you won't make friends."

"Idiot. If you don't understand anything, then don't say anything. I was saving the world just now without anyone knowing it."

"Oh, really - that's awesome -"

Kirigirisu casually waved his hand and tilted his head a little upwards to look towards the other side of the forest. The sound of footsteps crunching against fallen leaves could be heard over there.

"… It's Guriko. She's catching up."

"If she's so insistent on following us - then why doesn't she just travel with us. Why can't she be closer to us? Kako, really…"

"It's Guriko!"

"…"

The two travelers stared at each other, then they shrugged and looked towards the burning campfire.

The crunching steps moved closer and closer, but stopped shyly not far from them. Then, perhaps to calm the person hiding over there, or perhaps just to pass the time -

Kirigirisu took out an instrument and started to play, while Kudan matched his rhythm and began to sing. The song was very simple, even somewhat crude, but it wasn't unpleasant.

It was a song of love that could be heard anywhere, extremely simple, and with lyrics that anyone would have come up with.

…

"…"

His consciousness left him again.

How long did he sleep for? He remembered many memories in his dreams. Kudan and Kirigirisu - those two odd travelers, yes. He could no longer detect time. He had no idea how many years it had been since then. The world was perhaps constantly changing at a dazzling speed. Only the forest around him was the same as before.

How long - has it been since then?

Did he still - had to keep living?

His ears heard some music.

What a beautiful sound.

The clear sound of bells, the singing of birds, and the chime of expensive instruments - the sound of singing seemed to merge with these other sounds and yet far surpassed them all. This singing shook his empty, depleted heart.

But what exactly was this?

How interesting - the lyrics were very strange.

“I am tired of Pa and Ma, and left home with my elder brother~ Walking along the gloomy forest path, I’m not afraid as long as I follow my brother~ God of the forest, please don’t bother us. I don’t want to go home, don’t want to go back to my previous home~”

The singing was remarkably optimistic, very incongruous to the verdant and darkened forest.

As if the she sang to dispel the gloom and horror of the forest, her voice shook slightly with fear.

“We finally arrived to the home of sweets~ The paradise for me and brother~ But this is the witch’s home~ The witch is so scary when upset, and she was going to kill us~ Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid, I will protect brother~”

The singing and the steps were getting closer and closer, moving towards the place where his rotten being was located. The happy singing of the intruder startled the beasts and birds in the forest, and caused them to stir.

“Ready - “

Perhaps suddenly becoming excited, the voice suddenly went up octaves, so high it was unbelievable.

“Let’s kill her with Chocolate *Let’s kill her with Lemon pie* Let’s kill her with Sugar candy *Let’s kill her with Ice cream* Let’s kill her with Funny jelly -”

Crunch. The steps on the fallen leaves was so close.

He lowered his head. His entire body was still secured in the thick bush, and only his head was hanging free. The owner of the voice perhaps discovered him - she gave out a disrespectable scream and backed away many steps. Then, she rudely picked up a short stick and poked at his head.

“… He’s really here. But - is he still alive?”

This long-forgotten feeling. This stimulus - coming from other people.

He lifted up his face slightly.

“You’re still alive. That’s wonderful.”

That person smiled and showed a genuinely happy expression.

“Urk…”

That person - she took out a piece of paper from her pocket and read dryly from it:

“I am Poison
Catastrophe
.”

Then, she stared at him with her unique purple eyes.

“Are you - Single Room?”

His world once again begun to turn.

It had been exactly seven hundred years since the appearance of those two strange travelers.

Symphony 1: Unable to transmit via songs alone

(Omitted) - Myths from every culture in the world record the legend of the Great Flood without fail. Noah's Flood in the Bible, the legend of the flood of Gilgamesh from Mesopotamia, the legend of Manusmṛti in the Veda scriptures of India. Greek mythology, Roman mythology, and of course, Japanese mythology. The torrential flood erupting forth in the myths had a destructive impact on our world – specifically, utterly destroying the world. Many academics insist that there are startling similarities between the floods described in these myths, and that this may imply there was a historical version of the gigantic flood that destroyed the world.

But mythologies are not historical records. They are moral tales in the guise of stories. More importantly, the facts they record are not necessarily real, though many people, including many educated people, mistake mythologies as being historical records that noted down factual events accurately.

Indeed, there is a lack of evidence for - and much evidence against - the existence of the aforementioned great flood; from this we can conclude that a flood of such scale has never occurred on Earth. A gigantic flood that destroyed the world would certainly have left behind clear marks on the geography and geology of the Earth. However, a study of these confirm that such a thing has never occurred. After innumerable investigations, we can prove that the Great Flood never existed.

But if the world has never been destroyed by a great flood in the past, then why are there similar legends of such a flood in cultures throughout the world? Even culture in areas where it was geographically impossible to suffer from historical floods had legends involving the world being destroyed by a flood.

How did that come about?

In short, it is because legends are not historical records, but philosophical stories. These stories incorporated both the objective impressions and the emotions of the author, with their plots being the products of the societies of the time. As such, they are the product of the universal human consciousness.

If the record-like properties of mythologies ceased to exist, then so

would the mysterious qualities of God.

God will fall to level of a human with the fall of myth.

However, there are still many who mistook humans as God, and note their actions as myths and legends.

Thus, myth are no longer stories of God, but purely stories of humans.

Why did every country preserve the legend of the great flood in their myths? Returning to our previous query, the answer is very simple if we consider a simple question: Why are the records of the great flood that destroyed the world always at the beginning and prologue of the myths, and never at the end of the legends? We can easily find the answer if we follow this train of thought.

I believe legends talk about the journey of human life.

Whether consciously or unconsciously - we cannot ascertain which - the legends are talking about life.

Try to recall how our lives began. Let us place aside the ignorant fantasies of many academics, who believe a great flood erupted at the beginning of the world. No matter who we are, every one of us had experienced this flood - this flood that destroyed our world when we were born.

That was when our mothers gave birth.

We were originally within the dim, constant, and perfectly safe world inside our mother's body. Suddenly, as if someone declared there must be light, we were forcibly brought to the outside. The world within our mother's bodies started to crumble with a great flood of mixed blood and amniotic fluid. We were born into this dangerous and ruthless world together with this uncertainty.

It is this primordial, collective memory that lies behind the many legends and records concerning the great flood and the consequential destruction of the world. Destruction that was not the end of all things, but the beginning of everything. This was the most salient point to those legends that start with a flood that wiped out the world.

The myths afterwards also parallel the journey of life.

All should be able to understand now that “God”, the absolute existence that is the protagonist of myths, is “me”. “I” fought with other Gods (in myths of monotheistic faiths, the other gods are presented as devils of demons) - in other words, other “me”s, and finally created a peaceful world after numerous defeats.

Be it the Bible, Celtic legends, Egyptian legends, Chinese legends, or Ugaritic legends… All myths have this commonality: what they tell is not the story of “God”, but stories of “me”.

In some legends, God considered humans failures and denied our existence. This was because the author of the myth - “me” - could not trust other humans and denied their existences.

Such authors must be people with gloomy personalities, who found it difficult to communicate with others. If we accept the proposition that “God” is none other than “me”, and read the myths with this idea in mind, then it will become incredibly interesting.

I am getting sidetracked. Let us stop there.

In conclusion, I hereby refute the many people who regard their fantasies as matters of fact and firmly believe in them. God is not an absolute existence who is looking down upon the world from somewhere high above. At the end, the only absolute existence in “my world” exists in the center of “my world”, and is none other than “me”. A God that controls miracles, fate, and mysteries does not - can not - exist. Myths are only ordinary stories that describe normal human lives. I am God, and myths are human lives. What follows may seem unnecessary - but if we consider the above conclusion, then we may be able to understand the “purpose of God” in myths.

That means - (Omitted)

— “The Unified Structure of God and Me” by Akutagawa Shirayuki, student of Class 1-D of Kanaryō Prefectural High School

Breaksun Hanselmine had seventy-seven younger sisters and sixty-six younger brothers, but no older siblings. There were fifty-five people whom she called ‘mother’, but only one father.

She had no friends, and of course, no lovers.

But recently, she obtained an unusual roommate.

She dyed her hair.

She had been interested in this for a while now. Due to her whimsical personality, however, she kept wondering if her hair could go back to how it was before she dyed it. She also worried that her hair would become unhealthy and start falling out. She worried that the police would be upset at her for having an unusual hair color - therefore, she had never managed to dye her hair at the end.

Until now.

Since she wanted a change of mood, and that she still could not let go of her interest, she finally dyed her hair when she saw a hair salon by chance. The hairdresser held up the color palette and asked her what color she would like, and she pointed randomly at a picture due to nervousness and confusion. As a result, her hair became green.

She was dumbfounded when she saw her own head in the mirror. *What is this color? This looks like an alien! - Alien? Nice! Aren't aliens cool?* Her mood was switched in three mere seconds and she returned home to show off to her roommate.

But her roommate was too sharp-tongued and said that the color looked like vegetable juice, the fact that his own hair looked like tomato juice notwithstanding.

" - Crunch, crunch, crunch crunch…"

Her roommate was chewing on some plastic toys as per usual today, like a dog.

No, not like a dog; he veritably was a dog, and these toys had been bought from the pet store anyways.

He was a short young man with fiery red hair, and his eyes were sharp like those of a hungry beast. And though he had a face as elegant as a girl's, he was not cute at all. He was an arrogant and egotistical person.

He didn't have a name yet, but he was not too concerned with this.

Still, it was troublesome to go on without having a name, and so, she had been thinking one up since the morning. She finally decided on one after a day of thinking.

"… Crunchy, crunchy - hmm?"

He took the toy out of his mouth and revealed his cute baby teeth. Not only were they cute, the strength of these teeth was also astonishing. It would hurt to get bitten by him – the various uneven teeth marks on the hard toys were evidence enough of that.

Only two people lived in this small apartment, barely a size of four and half tatamis. There was almost no furniture in the room due to her poverty, and it looked terrible. Indeed, the entirety of her furnishings consisted of three storage boxes she bought during a sale, and a case that contained the worn guitar she had brought from her home.

"Your name –

Breaksun suddenly pointed at the boy, who was spacing out, and declared: "You shall be Nikuyama Kajiri!"

"…"

He looked expressionless, like a puppy that was drenched by a water gun. There were hardly any changes to his expression, and he was really like a dog. Why?

"… Crunch, grind."

She felt like he ignored her.

Her red-haired roommate was chewing on toys again.

"Don't ignore me! Isn't this a good name, Kajiri?"

Breaksun tilted her head and looked at him. He took out the toy from his mouth again and looked at her with some spite: "… Breako's sense of color and language are both rather weird."

"I'm not Breako! I'm Breaksun Hanselmine!"

Breaksun declared this while puffing out her chest. His reaction was not a happy one: “I can’t remember such a long name. Tch, and what’s this ‘Kajiri’? And what’s Nikuyama? Meat-Mountain – is that even a human name?!”

“… You’re complaining a lot… It took me some effort to think it up. I’ll be upset at ungrateful people like you! You won’t get toys anymore!”

She suddenly snatched the toy from him, still wet with his drool.

“Aaaah –”

He immediately looked like he was going to cry. Breaksun returned the toy straight away. She was most terrified of this guy’s pitiful looks. Breaksun wasn’t good at dealing with other people’s negative emotions, and yet his sentiments were so frank and unpolished.

While she was worrying about this, he chewed the toy in supreme happiness and asked: “… So did you get a job today?”

“Not at all. I’ve been circling the town since morning, and no jobs dropped in front of me.”

“Are jobs things that will drop onto the road??”

“It’s only a simile. I’m a poet.”

Breaksun puffed up her chest and praised herself, but he ignored her.

“… Tch, that’s not a problem. We won’t die even if we don’t have enough money to eat. It won’t matter if we don’t force ourselves to work.”

“Don’t say that. The duty to go to work is legislated by the Japanese Constitution.”

“You even brought out the Constitution. You really do like rules, and yet your existence is something outside of all the rules.”

She couldn’t understand what he meant, but it probably wasn’t anything good.

Breaksun couldn’t help but be upset at his naturally emotionless face and stretched her hand towards him, who was sitting cross-legged on the bed and chewing his toy. He would probably keep

chewing for eternity if she left him alone.

“Uuuuu….!” He became alarmed, perhaps thinking that the toy would be taken away again. However, Breaksun casually pulled him up out of the bed.

“Let’s go eat. Let’s go have dinner.”

“You still feel hungry? So strange. Judging from the time when you got the Fragment, such feelings should have disappeared by now.”

“I don’t know. Who cares. Eat, let’s go eat!”

She dragged him out forcibly and Breaksun opened the door. According to Kajiri, she seemed to have received a “Greater Fragment of God”. Her body should no longer feel hunger, pain, and temperature. That was not what she was feeling at all, though. How did that happen?

Who cares. Let’s just go eat dinner now.

“Aaah –”

Whoever fixed the door did a shoddy job and she seemed to have smacked the door into someone. Breaksun was a little shocked and retracted back. She was reassured when she saw who that person was and smiled.

“Good evening, Ring-Bell.”

“Ah, good evening, Break-nee.”

The girl who was greeting them humbly was named Usagawa Rinne. In this apartment complex, where the rent and the environment were both vastly below average, Rinne lived next door to Breaksun. Rinne was a good girl rare in the current era, and Breaksun liked her a lot.

Rinne had a head of pale pink hair, and was wearing the uniform of the nearby high school. She was holding the keys to her room, as if she just came back from somewhere.

“Ring-Bell, did you go to work again today?’

“Ah? Yes, at the post office.”

She was a very poor student. This was evident from her living in this apartment alone and having to work every day. On that point, she was much better than Breaksun, who remained unemployed.

“Um…”

Breaksun silently prayed for Rinne’s happiness, and discovered Kajiri was standing mutely behind her. Breaksun was a bit flustered and spoke with her best expressionless face:

“Oh. This is my little lover… Ah, should I say Lover Number One? We are intimate everyday and enjoy ourselves with food and drinks, and he’s definitely not someone weird I picked up from a dark forest!”

Breaksun’s skills in lying were abysmal.

“Urk – Ah, well. Um…” Although Rinne was confused, she still smiled at Kajiri, who hid behind Breaksun and was as alarmed as a dog. “I’m Usagawa Rinne. A pleasure to meet you.”

“…”

This doggie, on the other hand, was very rude. He didn’t respond to the girl’s humble greeting and glared sideways at Rinne as if she was his enemy, shivering.

Yes, he was terrified of strangers.

Breaksun was already quite bad at communicating with others – no, she was very bad at it – but he was exaggeratedly terrible at it. This scene was bound to be repeated every time he met someone new, and it really frustrated Breaksun.

“Ah, I’m sorry, Ring-Bell. He is very shy. Alright Kajiri, say hello. She’s a good girl and won’t bite or bark, and she won’t get upset and destroy everything around her.” Breaksun said all this with seriousness, but Rinne’s expression changed a little. Kajiri was rather obedient and nodded towards Rinne, while mumbling a greeting: “… Hello.”

“Ordinary people won’t greet others in that way. Kajiri is way too

shy. Ah, I'm sorry Ring-Bell."

"Ah – don't worry about it."

Kajiri looked away from Rinne and started pulling on his own clothes, as if unable to bear talking with a stranger. Why? Of course, Rinne was a rare acquaintance with whom Breaksun was able to talk freely. Neither of them were upset with his rude behavior, but it was more or less awkward. "Well, good bye, we're going to have dinner now. Right, that girl living with Ring-Bell –"

She remembered her name after some thinking. "Ah, Guriko. Please say hello to her for me. Bye-bye!" Breaksun waved goodbye and Rinne smiled happily. "Alright Break-nee, have a pleasant evening – oh, how do I say it? Well, Break-nee, Kajiri-san, see you later."

"…Guriko?"

Kajiri, for some reason, responded to that name, but Rinne did not notice it and returned to her room. Breaksun asked Kajiri curiously as they stood in front of the closed door.

"Kajiri, you know Guriko?"

"Mmm – no, I've only heard that name before."

He began to become vague again and started pulling on his clothes. "…Let's go quickly. It'll be very crowded in the restaurant otherwise."

"Alright alright." Breaksun replied with a smile. Her face was very tender as she pondered how this boy got so docile all of a sudden.

The situation with Usagawa Rinne, the girl living next door, took on an incredible change a few weeks later. The two of them also went through an unimaginable event.

Breaksun had a kind of feeling towards Kajiri that was more close to egotism than love.

She was happy whenever she was with Kajiri. She would feel happy even if they were just conversing normally.

She was someone incapable of building up relationships with other people.

If one were to draw one's relationships with other humans as lines,

then Breaksun's lines were disappearing one by one.

Most people were completely oblivious to her when she talks to them.

Even if she occasionally made a friend, that person would completely forget about her the next day.

She simply could not become intimate with others. Other humans were only passer-bys in Breaksun's eyes. She had missed out on endless rendezvouses; her relationships broke up one after the other. At the end, Breaksun was left all on her own, and there was nothing she could do about it.

Her father told her it was the erosion of cause and effect.

…

Breaksun didn't really understand what that meant.

"Every shop is so crowded."

There were people queuing up in front of every restaurant in the shopping district. Groups of high school students noisily passed by in the middle of the road. The quick movement of all these people crushed Breaksun, and she kept muttering unhappily under her breath. She was wearing a completely out-of-fashion old dress, her head sporting long curly green hair that she just dyed, and she walked forward while tightly holding on to the hand of a red-headed boy – such an appearance would usually attract lots of attention. However, incredibly, nobody even looked at Breaksun.

As if she was a pebble lying next to the road, no one recognized her.

This was a world full of stimuli.

Images, sounds, scents, touch… The human brain filters through all the various stimuli and selects the information it needs. The brain would explode if we received all the information at once and processed them all.

And Breaksun seemed to be unnecessary information that was automatically expelled from human brains.

Breaksun tried to approach a student walking on the road, and she

stared at him straight in the eyes. However, he completely ignored her, and did not appear to see her.

Even if Breaksun was holding a knife right now and stabbed him, he might have died like this without realizing who the murderer was.

“An inborn mechanism to conceal yourself…”

“…Huh?”

As soon as she ranted about something, Kajiri would turn his head and look towards her. He could recognize her, and so could establish a human relationship with her.

Therefore, Breaksun needed him, and she loved him with a sentiment akin to egotism.

They walked on together side by side. As if they were wraiths, no one even looked at them.

“…This might not work if we eat in a shop. Let’s just buy some food from a convenience store?”

“Mmm, sure. Breaksun would be completely ignored by the staff in a restaurant, and we can’t order.”

Indeed.

Breaksun, transparent to everyone else as she was, faced many obstacles in daily life. It had been like this ever since she was very young, and she had gotten used to it from long ago. Kajiri looked towards Breaksun, who bent her body slightly forward, with his astonishingly innocent eyes.

His eyes were big and bottomless, as if he was an animal that knew no malice.

“Breako, let me remove your erosion of cause and effect.”

He touched the sharp crucifix hanging off his neck.

“Don’t you want to live an ordinary life? Don’t you want to be an ordinary human? You saved me from that forest, where time had stopped. I can fulfill your wishes as compensation.”

His irises were of a dark red color, like that of rubies. That pair of innocent eyes were completely different from those of other

humans, which were mixed with impurities such as sentiments and desires. However, his eyes were terrifying because of that. It was as if his eyes had a cold aura about them.

“If there is anything you are displeased with in this world, then I can annihilate it. If there is anything you feel to be unjust on this Earth, then I can completely destroy it. This is my room. Nothing is impossible.”

“…”

He said all this with a serious face. However Breaksun, who looked at him, still smiled vaguely as usual and softly patted his head.

“I’m very happy.”

Kajiri looked surprised. Breaksun muttered to herself casually: “I have Kajiri with me, the food I eat is very delicious, I sleep very well, and I will forget everything unpleasant as soon as I start to sing. I am very content. I am really, genuinely content.”

Breaksun’s face was full of tenderness as she spoke, as if she was educating a young child.

“So Kajiri doesn’t need to change the world for me. Your life force would be reduced whenever you use your power, no? It doesn’t matter how glorious the world is or how happy it is. All that would lose its meaning if Kajiri started to suffer.”

There was a convenience store at the end of the shopping street not far from them.

“Please don’t do anything and just stay by me, alright? My dear God?”

“… I’m not a god!” Kajiri turned his head aside, but a comforted smile surfaced on his face.

Breaksun was sitting in the courtyard of a nearby shrine, and her mouth was stuffed with menchikatsu she bought at the convenience store.

There was no one here and was very spacious and quiet. Only the wind listlessly blew the fallen leaves round and round.

“Kajiri, you are not going to eat?”

Kajiri was sitting cross-legged on the stone steps and peering curiously at the street below.

Despite the age and dilapidation of the shrine and its small size, it was located on high ground and offered a good view at the top.

Kajiri grinned to show his baby teeth and carelessly looked far into the distance like a cat. Upon hearing the question, he looked impatiently at Breaksun, whose cheeks were stuffed full with food: "Seriously, do I have to tell you again? I don't need such things. I can't feel hunger, temperature, or pain. Do you understand that?"

"What about taste?"

"No taste for me either! So I can't enjoy eating even if I do eat."

"Jesus Christ!" Breaksun yelled in English, her mother tongue, and looked pitifully at Kajiri. "I'm going to cry because of you. Not being able to taste any food – what a cruel and despairing Hell that would be!"

"… No, it's not that bad."

Breaksun sat down next to Kajiri, who was spacing out, and munched on the menchikatsu while muttering to herself: "Mmmm… Munch…. So delicious!"

"… Good."

"I want Kajiri to experience the joy of food too!"

A beautiful sunset and a view of the street as if looking at a miniature set made up the scene before them. Breaksun suddenly put her hand on her chest and laughed.

"Right. Let me sing and pass this touching emotion to Kajiri. The title shall be 'The Song of How Delicious Menchikatsu Is."

"… No thanks."

"Fuuuu – "

Breaksun took in a deep breath and completely ignored Kajiri's words. The scent of fallen leaves was mixed into the air during the sunset, and it felt very nice to have that filling her lungs.

The happiness that filled her heart and the simple thought of Kajiri

metamorphosed into tunes and lyrics and flew out of her body spontaneously.

“Crunchy – ” Her mouth started to sing before she realized it. “Crunch – crunchy – chew chew～” Was it even a song? “Don’t eat me, don’t eat me, don’t eat me～”

“Hold on Breako! You’re singing in the menchikatsu’s point of view! You shifted your position to that of the menchikatsu! That’s scary, and disgusting! You’re not going to pass on the happiness of eating menchikatsu!”

“…Am I going to die?”

“Come back! Come back from thinking like a menchikatsu! Breako!”

After Kajiri shook her forcibly, Breako finally regained her original sense of self. Her consciousness would disappear whenever she immersed himself into singing, and she would behave as if she was drunk and could fall to the floor.

“…Hehehe, I failed.” She knocked her own head.

“I’ve been thinking, maybe you lack the talent to sing.”

“No, no. There is no bird in the world that refuses to sing because it lacks talent, right?” Breaksun smiled without any embarrassment. “I sing because I want to sing. Happiness, joy, sorrow, loneliness – one would collapse if you hole up too much of these emotions inside. That’s why people rant to each other, draw random shapes, or open their mouths and sing confused words to release their emotions. But I have no one to talk to, so I can only sing.”

She’d been like this ever since she was young, and she kept singing like a bird. Even though singing couldn’t communicate a lot, it was better than doing nothing.

“I love this world. It’s so wonderful to be born. It’s so wonderful to be alive in this world. I was given life, and I am very grateful to the world for that… Therefore, Kajiri, I will sing to the world – I will continue to pass on this sentiment of gratitude till the end.”

Hiss – Breaksun took in a deep breath and started to sing loudly.

“Lost lost little kitten – turning turning come to eat.”

"… I would think the World will feel rather confused when it hears this song."

He always felt anxious whenever night falls.

What would he do if dawn never appeared again? What would he do if the world became like that gloomy and dark forbidden forest again and all dreams, hopes, and light disappeared?

The red-haired boy given the strange name of Nikuyama Kajiri – no, the immortal with the appearance of a boy - was terrified of the monstrous dark and shivered.

What would he do if his current life was only a beautiful dream?

Or what if he was tricked again – what would he do if he was again isolated in that eternal solitude?

"– Then, good night!"

The two of them strolled around till dusk after they finished dinner in the shrine in town. It seemed to have become a necessary part of their everyday lives. Breaksun usually talked without stopping during this time.

She told the boy many many things.

Things such as this era was named the Heisei Period; such as how the governance of this country is split into that of the executive, legislative, and the judicial branches; such as how there are no more wars. Apart from these more general things, she also talked about how the dessert with the sweet stuffing from the sweet shop in the shopping street was a supreme treat, how cats with black tails have fleas and shouldn't be touched, and other such nonsensical things.

She had always wanted to talk to people, but could not do so because her supernatural ability. Therefore, like a teenage girl who had been locked up in her room for a long time, she kept talking endless trash talk that made no sense.

Apart from talking endlessly, she also took Kajiri to play in amusement parks and zoos, and used the only bit of money she had left to buy video games to play with him. She spent every day dragging Kajiri around, making him experience all sorts of things.

Kajiri didn't know what to do. He usually did not respond to Breaksun, but it wasn't unpleasant either.

"… It's probably time to sleep, Kajiri?"

It was seven o'clock at night. Although it was late, it was too early to sleep. Breaksun had the habit to sleep very early since she had nothing to do at home, and had too much time on her hands. Kajiri had to conform to her habit and get into bed early.

It was the time for Breaksun to use her unintelligible foreign language to pray for Kajiri once they turned off the lights.

He didn't respect this habit, but nor did he laugh at her. She could pray if she wanted to pray. She could sing if she wanted to sing.

However, in this world where God was broken and shattered, neither song nor prayer had any meaning.

But that was fine if it could heal Breaksun's heart. Compared to Kajiri, who stayed beside her but could give her nothing, the one she was praying to might actually save her.

"…" Kajiri decided to ignore her and pretended to sleep on the bed. He was still unaccustomed to talking with other people.

The long years of solitude had robbed away all of Kajiri's sociability.

The narrow, four-and-a-half-tatami sized room only had a single mattress, so Breaksun and Kajiri slept together. She never treated Kajiri as a male, but something like a dog or a cat. She would hum some strange lullaby as she petted his head.

"Sleep quietly~ Cherry pudding~"

He had no idea what she was singing.

Kajiri's body unconsciously shrank back when someone else's fingers touched him. So scary. Other people were so scary.

That forest and those cruel people who locked him up seemed to resurface again in the darkness.

"Sleep after having eaten your full~ Cherry pudding~"

Poison
Catastrophe
. Melodia Noise
Tear Song
. Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
.

Those were the names of the ones who locked him up due to their fear of Single Room's powers. Poison
Catastrophe
– Would Breaksun, who inherited this Greater Fragment, leave him behind just like they did in the past? He did not know for sure.

He should not trust anyone. He was unwilling to trust anyone. If he started to believe again, then –

The boy called Kajiri closed his eyes tight and was afraid of everything around him.

Why was Breaksun so gentle to him? She did not ask for compensation and stayed with him as if she was meant to be there, and slept with him while singing lullabies for him.

At least – yes, if she at least bore some evil intent as she caressed him, then Kajiri would be able to fearlessly hate everything about this world.

But Breaksun's hand, which caressed his head in the darkness, was infinitely gentle.

When he came to, he realized he had just fallen asleep.

As an immortal, sleep was something like a hobby, which could be controlled with his consciousness.

Sleep was originally the required time for the brain and the body to rest, and to allow the information gathered while awake to be re-

organized.

However, as he was now a Fragment of God, his body would never get tired and he did not need to rest. His mind also organized information in a different way, and the act ended the moment it began.

It was simply boring to never sleep. It felt good to just not think of anything, and just calmly discard all consciousness – such times were great times of happiness for immortals.

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
.

Poison
Catastrophe
.

Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
.

For Kajiri, who had endured betrayal from his three friends, who had been cursed with not having any connections in the world, and who had been isolated in the gloomy forest, a restful sleep was his most familiar state of being. In order to pass the maddening eternal solitude, Kajiri kept sleeping like Sleeping Beauty, forgotten by the world.

It should probably have continued like that forever.

Just like in a fairytale, the unfortunate people will become happy, evil will finally be destroyed, and the world will definitely become peaceful if the beautiful maiden was always found by the prince.

But there were no saviours in reality. All of Kajiri's expectations and hopes were destroyed, and he spent his life meaninglessly at the bottom of the valley of despair.

– I am Poison.
Catastrophe
She spoke the name of the one who had betrayed Kajiri.

– Are you Single Room? She called out to him using the 'role' that the world gave him, that ominous name.

– *Please help me.* She muttered these words with a voice as soft as drizzling rain.

What did Breaksun want from Kajiri? She took him into the outside world and had lived with him for a few weeks now, but he still had no answer to that question. He had told her many times that he could fulfill her wishes as long as she voiced them, but she always simply smiled and said she was happy as she was. He did not understand her at all.

Other had always sought the omnipotent power within the Greater Fragment named Single Room, and kept asking for Kajiri's help.

They wanted to change this world.

They wanted to be happy.

Humans kept wishing for such things over and over.

No – it wasn't limited to humans. All beings who approached him had the same goal. Even supernatural beings like Poison Catastrophe, Melodia Noise Tear Song, and Ultimate Shield The Weakest had asked Single Room to fulfill their wishes innumerable times.

He had thought that was how it was meant to be. That this was his 'role'. Kajiri was permitted to exist because he fulfilled other's wishes. That was the reason and meaning of his existence.

But Breaksun made no wishes.

Kajiri thought she was a very strange woman.

" _"

He suddenly woke up.

Time seemed to have completely stopped. The chirping of crickets could be clearly heard through the apartment's thin walls. Kajiri

was a little perplexed at waking up so suddenly. Did his subconscious sense danger? He wasn't sure.

"…Breako?"

Breaksun wasn't there.

At first he thought she might have gone to the toilet, but there were no signs of it.

Kajiri suddenly became fully awake and began to feel uneasy.

Was he abandoned in the darkness all on his own again –? He couldn't help but feel terrified when he thought of this.

"…"

Kajiri wanted to wait for a while at this spot, but he could not stop himself from coming up with worst-case scenarios in his head and stood up nervously. He could not lie around so casually. Just where did Breaksun go? Did she leave him behind?

Her duvet was still warm. It hasn't been long since she left.

At the end, Kajiri ran anxiously out of the room.

"Hey, am I a bit strange recently?"

"I've always felt that Miku was strange…"

"It's more like you've finally realized what you are…"

"Stop it! I'm being serious! I'm really scary whenever I get angry! How do I say this… I'd get cold for no reason recently. My body would start shivering, and I would be so anxious and startle awake at night."

"…"

"What? Why aren't you talking to me? Is it really so strange to talk about these teen issues?"

“No – it’s not like you’re the only one with these problems, Miku.”

“Mayu? Huh, where’s Mayu?”

“What’s wrong Rei-chan?… Oh, where’s Mayu-chan?”

“I’m looking for her too. How did she disappear so quickly?”

“…No way?”

“Woah! What’s this? Mysteriously disappearing? Eeek –”

“Such a bother! Recently it’s just – really annoying!”

“Teehee!”

Kajiri ran out of the house blindly, but he was hindered by Breaksun’s so-called “inborn mechanism to conceal oneself”, an ability that allowed no one to notice her. Even his eyes had limits. Kajiri became completely lost after he ran for just a little while.

His untidy red hair, which was tied up haphazardly, waved from left to right like the tail of a puppy.

“… Crunch, crunch!”

He anxiously chewed the doggie toy he brought with him. He couldn’t recall when he started having this hobby. What he knew was that his mind would become calmer whenever he did that. Breaksun would stop him from chewing on this when they strolled in the street, saying it was disgraceful. However, that women, who was so pedantic about the weirdest details, was currently missing.

“…Phew!”

He spat the fragments of the toy that he chewed off to the side of the dim road.

“It’s more difficult than I imagined. The erosion of cause and effect brought about by Poison
Catastrophe
– Tch, I can’t find her at all. Breako, just where exactly did she go?”

Kajiri mumbled unhappily as he wandered in the empty shopping district. He didn't know what the time was, but it must be very late at night. All the shops have closed for the day. Only some bars still had rays of light coming out of the windows, and some drunkards were crowded around those establishments.

With his sharp nose, Kajiri smelt the thick smell of alcohol wafting through the air. He frowned, then turned towards dark and deserted streets in search of Breaksun.

"…Hmm?"

He saw the school building of the Kannonsakazaki High School after he walked for a while. It was an old school, and the exterior did not look very special. Kajiri had walked throughout this town many times with Breaksun, and knew a thing or two about this school.

"The school? She couldn't possibly be here, right?" He looked around with alarm. Just then, a group of people walked out of the gates of Kannonsakazaki High School. They were girls wearing uniforms, and they had probably stayed behind to study or for club activities. That would be why they stayed till such a late time. With his human-phobia, Kajiri hid behind the fences of the school without thinking.

"– That's right!" "– Isn't it?" The girls chatted as they walked and did not discover Kajiri at all while walking past him. They chatted chirpily and did not notice him at all.

Kajiri took a deep sigh and hugged his shivering body tightly.

"…Damn it, so embarrassing. Stop shaking…"

He had been betrayed by the friends whom he had trusted, and had been separated from the world in solitude for hundreds of years. Kajiri was very scared of other people. If others so much as approached or touched him, he would feel the fear of betrayal. Even such innocent young girls would make him terrified. He had the power to create the world and was the existence closest to God. He was Single Room, the brain of God – and yet he was such a coward. How laughable.

"…Huff, Huff…"

It was better when Breaksun was next to him. Although they'd only been together for a short period of time, Kajiri had started to

understand her personality a little.

She was rather naïve, did not defend herself against other people, and didn't have a single thought about tricking or using others. Breaksun kept calling Kajiri a doggie, but her personality was more like an animal.

She was naïve and innocent. She had perhaps never thought much of anything.

Fundamentally, although Kajiri still could not trust others, he was starting to like Breaksun. Although he still harbored doubts and was afraid of traps, he could still feel that having such a paranoid guard against others was ridiculous.

But other humans were still scary. Just walking alone in a street of humans would make his breathing accelerate, would make his heart beat faster, and cold sweat start to pour down from his neck.

"Phew –" So useless. He had become astonishingly weak.

"Single Room. Confirmed." A strange sound suddenly appeared next to him. "Information update. Single Room's current location, current appearance, current Fragment power reserve, and –"

It was a voice like the falsetto of a man and the contralto of a woman; an unique voice that could not be copied – such a voice flew into Kajiri's ear.

"You… are –"

It was a plain and ordinary girl standing there.

She wore the uniform of the Kannosakazaki High School. She wore fashionable make-up, and her hair and jewellery were somewhat unique. She carried a school bag and had leather shoes on. She looked quite plain, with the kind of face that people would not notice even if they walked past her on the street.

But her eyes were red.

They sparkled with a strange inner light and looked at him emotionlessly, like the eyes of an insect.

"Update complete."

The girl continued with an even tone, completely devoid of

personality or emotions.

“It has been 834 years 7 months 11 days 2 hours 5 minutes and 2 seconds since we last met, Single Room. Do you still remember how to use us – God Mushi Emperor? I have the duty to explain everything to you, and you have the right to demand explanations from me.”

“… It’s been a long time, Information-Broker.”

Kajiri replied in a low voice. He had a rare, genuine expression on his face, without any of the shivers that accompanied his meetings with other people.

What stood before him was not human. It had no emotions, no sense of self, no personality, no individual will – everything that defined an ‘individual’ was gone. Therefore, it would never betray him. It was an almost mechanical existence, and therefore he did not need to fear it. She stood there blankly, and her hair swayed in the wind.

“Information-Broker is only one of our roles. That is not an appropriate name. Please call us ‘Mushi’, or ‘Insects’, or you may call us by our real name, ‘God Mushi Emperor’.”

Kajiri crossed his arms and smiled sarcastically, showing his canine teeth. She was only one of the 666 split bodies of the existence named God Mushi Emperor, one of the terminals that served the collective.

“I’ve almost completely forgotten you lot. So, you – Information-Broker – appeared just to let others know that I have successfully escaped from that place?”

“I do not understand what you mean by ‘that place’. Please tell me the name of the location. Also, we do not trade information. Information-Broker is not an appropriate name.”

The Mushi tilted its head, maintaining an emotionless face.

Kajiri considered for a while, but he did not know the exact name of the forest where he was once imprisoned. He scratched his head and started while staring at the insect. “…Ah, so boring. Someone probably caught a Mushi – one of you – and is investigating about me. Therefore, you’ve already passed the information about me being here to other people, right?”

“Yes, indeed so.”

She said with her unique, unpredictable tone that could be either respectful or rude.

“We are the Nerves and Blood Vessels of God – the Sensory Organ and the Digestive Organ are asking us about the other parts of God, and we can only rely what we know. That is our ‘role’ – have you forgotten that, Single Room?”

“…”

How bothersome, Kajiri thought. Poison Catastrophe was fine, but Melodia Noise Tear Song and Ultimate Shield The Weakest were those who betrayed him and locked him in that place. If they knew he already escaped, they might attack him fearing his revenge. He was now terrified of people, and a part of the power of his Fragment had been spent during his long imprisonment; Kajiri could not be totally confident about beating those others if it came to a fight. Breaksun also seemed unable to use her abilities properly, let alone fight with it. Moreover, he did not completely trust her yet.

He must manage on his own. Breaksun should be fine as long as she was singing her odd and spontaneous songs somewhere. That suited her best.

“…Hmm?”

Breaksun. Indeed.

She was currently missing – he should be able to find her using the information network of the Mushi. He decided to lay aside his own affairs for now and consider his next moves later. He must find Breaksun first. He could not rest otherwise.

“Mushi, do you know the current whereabouts of Poison Catastrophe ?”

“… Please wait a minute.”

Yes, Breaksun has inherited the Greater Fragment named Poison Catastrophe, one of the seven 'roles' of the broken God. She has the power to corrode and twist cause and effect – it was the terrifying Fragment that once collapsed the Tower of Babel and threw the entire human race into chaos and confusion.

It was only that, she couldn't yet control that terrifying power. Rather, she could not easily manipulate that power based on her own will. He didn't know why, but her power was born with her and activated naturally rather than under her direct control. This should increase the chances of finding her.

Right then – "Poison Catastrophe, God's Communication Organ, has been located." Its red eyes sparkled with light as the Mushi silently turned to him. "However, due to Poison Catastrophe's corrosion of cause and effect, the reliability of this information has been reduced. Is that alright?"

"…"

It couldn't be helped. He wanted any kind of information, any at all. Breaksun was the woman who saved him and stayed with him till now. Kajiri will definitely save her if she was in danger.

"Poison Catastrophe's current location – is over there."

The Mushi pointed towards a building far to the distance and said evenly.

"Her precise location cannot be ascertained due to her corrosion of cause and effect. This concludes our analysis of Poison Catastrophe's current location."

"Hold on! You only said 'over there'. I can't work with that!"

Kajiri followed up with his question, but that was useless. The Mushi could only communicate what it understood. No matter how he threatened or entreated, it could not explain Breaksun's whereabouts with more detail.

While he thought about this –

"– Extra information." The Mushi looked at Kajiri and started with a low voice again. "There is another Greater Fragment next to Poison Catastrophe
."

"What did you say…?"

There was another Greater Fragment next to Poison Catastrophe
– next to Breaksun. Single Room – himself – was right here, so God Mushi Emperor shouldn't be referring to him with the term "Greater Fragment". Then it must be one of the others. Was it Melodia Noise Tear Song
, Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, Sterilization Disinfection, or Unpleasant Counter-Current?

"It's Melodia Noise
Tear Song
."

The Mushi coldly pronounced the name of another Greater Fragment that had once upon a time betrayed Kajiri.

She was afraid of being scolded for dying her hair, but her commissioner seemed completely disinterested in it and did not make a comment. That was fine – her role had nothing to do with her appearance. Worrying about that was pointless. Breaksun sighed softly.

The night has just begun. Such a long night it will be.

Her night job, which she did not tell her roommate out of shyness and kept going as a secret – has begun.

She took off her mundane clothes and put on a magnificent and perverted long dress that was enough to drive a designer mad. Rather than fashionable, it was more like the appearance of a devil worshipper. The girl named Breaksun Hanselmine had disappeared.

From now on, she had changed into something inhuman, an absolute existence.

“Are you ready?”

She was sitting in the dressing room and waiting for her turn on the stage. The TV in the room suddenly begun to glow and a sound came out of it. Her manager seemed to loath making appearances. Breaksun didn’t even know if her manager was male or female. She knew neither the appearance nor voice of the person who entered her into this career.

The digitally altered voice started speaking after Breaksun finished changing.

“Do entertain us well tonight like usual, Breaksun Hanselmine.”

“… Alright, Joker.”

Breaksun smiled gently and stood up brusquely, then kicked open the door of the dressing room.

Symphony 2: Whom does the Song of Love belong to?

“Do you know Single Room?”

It was said an angel of misfortune dropped by this town.

It was a girl. She never killed anyone, nor did she steal anything. She simply appeared like the wind and attacked passers-by.

It didn’t matter if her opponent was a muscular adult or an infamous delinquent. Even if her opponent had a knife or consisted of a group of a dozen people, this visiting angel of misfortune knocked them all to the ground and left these enigmatic words behind: “Do you know Single Room?”

No one had been able to answer that question.

“Guriko-chan～”

Nothing was going as she wanted. Her life was difficult. It was so tiresome to live. Life was so bothersome. She was so upset. At the end, she still hated herself, who couldn’t do anything. Gankyū Egoriko, otherwise known as Guriko, was completely helpless.

She was at the apartment she lived with Usagawa Rinne when she was just living off Rinne. Guriko folded her arms and sat cross-legged in this one-room apartment in the old building, which appeared it would topple with just a small earthquake. She was silent and looked annoyed. Her face was expressionless, her black hair cut in a wolf-like haircut, her dark and deep eyes looked dimly towards the ceiling like gun barrels, and she wore denim jeans and a T-shirt with cute prints as if she just wore whatever she happened to pick up.

There were two more people in this completely plain, undecorated room.

“Guriko-chan, Guriko-chan～”

One was a small girl who was holding onto Guriko’s waist and kept calling out her name. Her pale pink hair was decorated with ribbons and bows, and she looked very cute. Everyone who met her couldn’t help but be gentle with her.

Despite her appearance like a high schooler, her astonishingly innocent expression was like that of a baby. In fact, her linguistic abilities and intellect were more or less gone.

Usagawa Rinne – this girl who was previous killed by Sterilization Disinfection – became a living corpse, a Meat Doll. Meat Dolls do not have a sense of self nor the capacity for thought. They only moved according to their instincts. That was the current status of the girl named Usagawa Rinne.

In order to return this girl to her previous state, Guriko was currently looking for the ultimate existence that could materialize any miracles – the existence named Single Room. However, she yielded no results by searching on her own in this town. It had been two months already and she had yet to uncover any traces of Single Room.

Guriko muttered to herself and watched Rinne, who was walking around, and couldn't help but ask "Rinne, do you know Single Room?"

"Sin-gle-Room?" Looking at Rinne, who mechanically repeated her words, Guriko exhaled a long sigh.

"…Guriko, don't teach Milady odd phrases." Following these words, the young man cooking something in the kitchen looked back towards her. He was a blond man with blue eyes, who looked otherworldly in his beauty. His face, however, looked very haggard.

He was already looking better than before. He didn't even shave just a little while ago. His gaze was empty, and he looked veritably ill. Guriko left the town about half a year ago and have just returned to this apartment after her long journey, again living together with Rinne. She was used to living in the wilderness, but she could not leave this man alone. She was also worried about Rinne's condition, and therefore she moved in again. Judging from appearances, it was the same as before, with the three of them living peacefully together.

The handsome young man - Sakaki Guryū - looked down at her crossly. "Don't get too close to Milady. Milady likes you just as she likes a toy, and would miss you and go look for you whenever you leave."

"Shut it! Why should I care!"

Guriko slowly closed her eyes as she felt Rinne's body temperature, who was hugging her.

"It's Rinne's freedom to hug whoever she wants. I'm not bothered by it. Besides, if hugging me can cure Rinne, I'm welcome to the idea."

"…"

Sakaki lowered his brows and sighed deeply, then he silently went back to cooking. He started cooking with practiced ease.

"Apples" - once someone consumes such a thing, one would obtain the miraculous power of immortality. All three of them have already been endowed with this power. Immortals who have consumed Apples would usually completely lose their appetite. However, it had only been a short time since Sakaki and Rinne ate the Apple, therefore they still needed to eat.

The room was briefly silent. Guriko suddenly noticed something and furrowed her brows.

"Sakaki, are you jealous?"

She asked seriously.

"Are you envious? Envious of the good relationship I'm having with Rinne?"

"…"

He didn't reply.

It seemed she got it right. This guy was surprisingly childish at times, a trait that was completely at odds with his appearance.

Guriko laughed and tilted her head and drilled Sakaki, who had turned away: "Who are you jealous of? Rinne, or me?"

"Why should I be jealous of Milady?"

When she heard Sakaki's low mumble, a brief pain passed across her chest.

"…Er, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked."

Guriko looked away awkwardly and her eyes fell on the cellphone

placed on the tatami. The phone was vibrating. Someone was calling her. Guriko gently peeled away Rinne's hand and picked up the phone, and pressed down the answer button.

It was Rinne who taught her how to use this miraculous machine.

It was also Rinne who gave Guriko warmth, gave it to the girl had lived for a thousand years and was nothing more than an empty shell.

Guriko wanted to save Rinne.

That was all she wished for.

Even if Guriko cannot stay here after Rinne recovered. Even if it must cost Guriko's life. It will be very lonely, but it should be fine.

"…Who is it?"

"I'm Mina, Guriko-baby."

"Don't call me Guriko-baby!"

Guriko frowned when she heard the lazy female voice coming from the other end of the call. The other woman, however, completely ignored her.

"I caught one of God Mushi Emperor's terminals."

Saibara Mina nonchalantly said this from the other end of the line.

"I will now interrogate it to get everything it knows about Single Room. Come to my place right now."

After two weeks, her frozen time seemed to have started again.

Saibara Mina lived on the third floor of the same building. After having told Sakaki what was said in the phone call, Guriko ran out of the door without even changing her clothes – as she was about to head upstairs, she suddenly realized someone suspicious was in front of the apartment building.

"…"

"…"

To be more exact – she found a pervert.

"… No." "No, no!" A weak voice said to Guriko, who was frozen in shock.

It was a girl who looked like a primary school student. She kept shaking her head and kept saying 'no'. Guriko felt like she looked familiar. The girl had two short ponytails and her face looked intelligent, but at the same time looked as if she just pulled a prank and was afraid of being found out.

She would be an ordinary girl seen all over the town if it weren't for her non-existent arms.

But there was a collar on her neck.

The collar was attached to a strong chain, and the chain was tied to the pillar next to the apartment as if she was a dog. She – Aizawa Ume – blushed, leaned slightly backward, then yelled at Guriko.

"It's not like that! Trust me, Guriko-nee-san! I couldn't help it! Really, really – it's all Kurukiyo's fault. I'm totally the victim here…!"

This little girl who looked startled and said those broken and confusing words was the serial killer known as "Long-Armed Demon" who had killed more than ten people in Kannosakazaki. She was also an immortal – an Apple-holder. However, she had somehow become the pet of a certain perverted policeman in town.

"…"

Guriko walked towards the crying girl and asked confusedly. "What, what is this about? I don't quite understand. Are you having fun like this?"

"– Gah!"

Ume's ability, 'invisible fists', flew towards Guriko with a roar. The power of the Apple magnified her psychic abilities and made those fists as powerful as cannon balls. Guriko hurried to jump aside. With a 'bam' sound, a hole appeared at the place she was standing at before.

"… what are you doing! That's very dangerous!"

"Shut up, shut up shut up! Don't treat me like an idiot!"

Aizawa Ume kept firing out invisible fists. Guriko had to predict where she would strike and dodge ahead of time. Bam! Wham! The corridor and walls were all broken up and pieces flew everywhere.

Long-Armed Demon started to sob.

“I’m not having fun! It’s so embarrassing, I want to die! But I can’t help it. I want to stay next to Kurukiyo and live like a normal person, so I should fulfil his wishes as much as possible, right? Kurukiyo said this is normal, that this is an expression of love. I don’t understand…”

“…I don’t understand what you’re talking about, but I think you were tricked.”

Guriko said this straightforwardly.

Then she felt a bit odd and asked: “But Long-Armed Demon – couldn’t you use your ‘invisible hands’? If you don’t want to be kept by someone, couldn’t you have torn off that ornamental chain?”

“That’s what I mean… never mind.”

Ume stopped herself and shook her head.

“No. Kurukiyo still doesn’t know my hands have recovered. If he knew I regained those hands - that I became the monster named Long-Armed Demon again - he will hate me. Kurukiyo, he… he hates monsters.”

“…”

These words hurt the tender parts of Guriko’s heart a little, but her expression did not change. She was different from this girl. She did not care if she reverted to a monster. She cannot get Rinne to return to normal without the power of a monster.

Guriko shook her head to chase away the unpleasant feeling and looked at Ume.

“… By the way, Long-Armed Demon, you’re serving Zekiguchi Nashinori, aren’t you? Should you be so relaxed? Aren’t your current status and behavior contrary to Zekiguchi’s wishes? Won’t you bring trouble to Nageki the longer you stay here?”

“…”

Long-Armed Demon opened her eyes wide and large teardrops rolled down her cheeks. Ume seemed to be conflicted, and her shoulders shook.

She finally moaned in a low voice.

“… But I hate that. I don’t want to kill people anymore, and I can’t kill people anymore. I already know it feels much happier to save people than to kill them. I’ll be very unhappy if I stay with Zeki-kun.”

It was a low, hoarse voice. The voice of a lost child.

“I know this will bring Kurukiyo trouble, but… what should I do? What should I do? I don’t know! I just want to stay here! I - I - “

“I’m sorry, Long-Armed Demon.”

Long-Armed Demon sobbed as Guriko gently caressed her head and muttered.

“No - your name is Ume. It’s my fault. You’re still a kid. You don’t understand that complicated stuff.”

“… Don’t underestimate me.”

Ume kept pretending to be strong. Guriko hugged her gently.

“Mmm, I’m sorry, but I understand what you mean. I’m just the same.”

Guriko let go of her and smiled.

“Keep it up, Ume. I hope you will find happiness.”

“… Guriko-nee-san?”

Just as Guriko turned away from Ume, who was sitting there in a daze, the iron stairs at the corner of the apartment building started to creak. Nageki Kurukiyo appeared.

He was a strange man. His rather long hair covered the greater half of his face and his clothing was all wrinkled. The way he walked with his back hunched made him look like a wraith and he made no sound as he walked. He casually greeted the two of them.

“Ahh, I made you wait, Ume-chan… Mmm? Why are you crying?

Did Guriko-baby make you cry? That won't do. You must get on well with each other."

"Stop calling me Guriko-baby! Everyone is like that…"

Guriko pouted, then patted Nageki Kurukiyo's shoulder rather strongly.

"Also, my dear detective, your perverted behavior needs to have limits. If you dare to make Ume unhappy, then I'll gouge out your eyeballs!"

"Um! This is an expression of my love! Besides, going on a stroll with a collar is just the beginning of everything."

"… I'll gouge out your eyeballs."

Guriko pretended to chase the perverted detective who dared to prey upon elementary school students.

Once she caught up with Nageki, she did teach him a lesson. Guriko then returned to the apartment building with a satisfied expression, and walked towards Mina's room according to their previous arrangement.

Whether by accident or fate, many people involved with 'Apples' were living in this old and decrepit apartment.

She climbed to the third floor along the rusty stairs. The household with the name plate 'Saibara' on it was not as ordinary as it seemed, either.

"Chu～ Guriko-baby! Good evening, ha～"

"Why is everyone calling me Guriko-baby? Which bastard thought up this idiotic nickname? I'm going to blow your stomach open…"

The girl who opened the door had on a hat decorated with large and circular ears, and she wore gloves despite being indoors. Her expression was optimistic and full of smiles - her name was Saibara Mitsuki.

Mitsuki inherited one of the Seven Greater Fragments of God and represented one seventh of God's Role together with the name of Unpleasant Counter-Current. A monstrous strength that could punch a dent in an iron sheet lay behind her innocent looks.

She was originally Guriko's sworn enemy, but now they were comrades fighting for the same cause.

Mitsuki, who had her hair tied up in a braid, shouted into the room: "Big sis, the eyeball gouger is here~!"

"Oh, eyeball gouger, you're finally here."

The woman sniggering and sitting on the chair waved towards Guriko. Saibara Mina, this woman with her pristine white hair tied up in a braid, was Saibara Mitsuki's older sister. She was also an inhuman existence, one of the seven Roles of God, and was named Sterilization Disinfection after having also inherited one of the Seven Greater Fragments of God.

However, clothes and all sorts of trash were scattered all over the floor. A pile of something unrecognizable was dumped on the coffee table, and she was sitting there sedately with a can of beer in her hand, completely ignoring this horrendously chaotic scene all around her.

Mina looked at Guriko with red cheeks and burped.

"…Burp!"

"You're an immortal, and yet you're burping?! Are you having alcohol poisoning?"

Guriko took off her shoes as she said this and walked into the incredibly messy room. Mina and Mitsuki have both completely lost the ability to take care of themselves, and this room would become a hellish dirt pile as soon as someone ceases to help them.

The sisters only started living in this apartment a little while ago. Mina seemed to be a nurse at the hospital, and Mitsuki was a student at the Kannosakazaki High School. The white coat hanging off the cloth hanger on the wall should be Mina's work clothes.

Mitsuki, who still wore her school uniform, pushed a cushion over for Guriko to sit while smiling at her.

"Big sis has been very serious. She looks fine from the outside~ But it's really draining to be so uptight all the time. So that's why she's all sorts of useless as soon as she gets home~"

"I'm not useless! So rude! Burp~ Alright alright, Guriko-baby, come

here and pour me more beer.”

“…”

She would rather have her hands broken than to do that. She would rather die by a curse, or to have her entire family killed – Guriko’s head was full of how she would rather die than to pour beer for Mina. She sighed and looked at Mitsuki, who brought her a soft drink.

“Hey, Mitsuki, how’s your body? Nothing wrong so far?”

“Yep. Don’t worry, I am feeling very well~”

Mitsuki did a victory sign and smiled. The thin pigtail decoration on her butt curled up and swayed side to side. Due to what happened at the Eternity Institute – that place which was veritably an Institute of Nightmares – a while ago, Mitsuki overdrew the power of her Greater Fragment and her physical body almost broke down. In order to save her, Saibara Mina used one of her abilities, Jack Jewel Fixation Mist, and completely stopped the passage of time on Mitsuki’s body.

It was meant to go on forever – Mitsuki’s time was to be forever stopped like Snow White, who ate the poisoned apple. However, someone suddenly appeared and unsealed Mitsuki’s paused time, and returned her completely shattered flesh to its original state. That person was Single Room, the Greater Fragment of God who possessed the power of Genesis, the existence closest to God in this world. He was also the existence that Guriko and her friends were looking for.

Guriko was looking for him to revert Rinne, who became a Meat Doll, to her original state. Mina and Mitsuki were looking for him to ascertain if Mitsuki’s body was truly returned to normal.

Guriko looked at Mina seriously as she recalled her goal.

“Hey, Sterilization Disinfection, don’t act so drunk and hurry up and explain things to me. Did you really catch a Mushi, a terminal of God Mushi Emperor? Are there any news?”

“… Yes yes, don’t you fret. I do the necessary work diligently enough!”

Having sipped on some tea that Mitsuki brought him, Mina appeared more coherent and smiled at Guriko. She was sitting messily and cross-legged on the chair and looked at her younger sister, who was playing with her braid: “Ki-chan, show us the terminal of God Mushi Emperor.”

“Got it.”

With a bam, the wardrobe was opened, and Mitsuki proudly puffed up her chest.

But there was nothing within the empty, dim wardrobe. Guriko didn’t understand what was going on. She walked up and saw a bundle of suspicious ropes.

“…What is this?”

“Heh?”

Mina was also very surprised, and a confused look surfaced on her face. She walked up to Guriko and saw the empty wardrobe, then nodded with understanding: “Ah, that’s what happened.”

Mina clapped her hands.

“The Mushi died because we interrogated it too much. A Mushi is just like a monster and would disintegrate into thin air after it dies - so it only left the ropes we used to tie it up, that was all.”

“… Hey!”

Mina twitched the end of her mouth when faced with Guriko’s vicious look.

“Don’t worry, we already got the information we need. We didn’t kill the Mushi straightaway because we thought you’d believe the information more if it came straight out of its mouth.” Mina pointed at the cushion and motioned Guriko to sit down, then snapped her fingers.

“Mi-chan, get me the data.”

“Big sis, you’re ordering me around too much… Hold on~ Woaaaaahhh - “

Mitsuki swiftly picked out some pieces of paper from the untidy pile of rubbish.

Guriko placed it on the coffee table. It seemed to be a typed-up and printed summary of the information they got so far.

“This is…?”

There were only pictures of large buildings on it. Guriko couldn’t understand this at all, and passed it to Mina. Mina sipped on some tea and narrowed her eyes as she looked at the pictures: “In conclusion, we know where Single Room is.”

“Really?”

Guriko couldn’t help but yell out in excitement.

“Single Room is here? He’s so close to us? Awesome, let’s go right now - “

“Calm down. This isn’t like you.”

Mina smiled and knocked on Guriko’s forehead to stop the latter from jumping up in joy.

“This is the the information gathered by Mushi, the terminal of God Mushi Emperor. We didn’t quite understand what exactly it meant, so we interrogated it, and we didn’t expect to successfully narrow down on Single Room’s whereabouts to this degree. Mi-chan, get me the map!”

“Yes - “

Mitsuki was just sipping at her tea and forcibly pulled out her fingers from her gloves. She had to get up again after hearing her sister’s command, and dug out the pre-printed map from the messy rubbish pile.

She should have gotten everything ready. She really was messy.

“I can’t believe Single Room is so close to us!”

Guriko said this as Mina drew circles with a red marker pen on the large map, and pointed out the rough area. Although Guriko don’t quite know how to read maps, even she knew this was very close to them – rather, this circle included the apartment they were currently at and the Kannonsakazaki Private High School.

“The places he frequented are here, here, and here.”

Mina made a few marks on the map, and finally drew a star on a building.

“This place in particular. He seemed to be here every night, this building right here.”

She pointed at the photo of the building with the tip of her pen.

“We don’t know what he was doing there. However, considering that none of us can hide our whereabouts from the Mushi, he shouldn’t be doing anything dangerous - anyways, this is an important piece of information. Single Room doesn’t know about us for now. We need to get in touch with him and cage him in, and obtained our goals. We have only one chance.”

Indeed. If he knew he was being followed, Single Room would certainly hide or run away. If they contacted him carelessly right now, they may never know the way to return Rinne from a Meat Doll to a normal human.

Guriko’s face became solemn as she arrived at this conclusion.

“We must be very careful right now. If he got a bad expression of us, then we might not receive his help.”

“Yes… Anyways, we should try talking with him first. We can only pray that Single Room is a kind soul. However, the Greater Fragment closest to God - is probably going to be very unpredictable.”

Mina mumbled in a lowly voice, took out some canned beer from God knows where, and poured into Guriko’s teacup. The dark brown mixture of tea and beer flew out of the cup.

“…What are you doing, drunkard?”

“Mmm, let’s call it a day. We’ll discuss how to approach Single Room and how to fight him tomorrow. Anyways, to celebrate achieving our goal, let’s drink!”

“We’re having a banquet~” Mitsuki snuck up too, and brought a bunch of canned beers and dishes with her.

Mina popped open the canned beer and poured the whole can into her own glass, looking as if already drunk.

Guriko looked at her with incomprehension.

"… You really have no worries, do you? I'm not staying. I need to go back. I might die if our negotiation with Single Room breaks down - so I want to spend some time with Rinne and Sakaki."

"Oh? You won't even drink with me?"

Guriko stood up and was going to leave. Mina took hold of her shoulder in a drunken way.

"No, no. Guriko-baby is such a good friend of ours. We're comrades together. Let's drink together and have a good chat."

"… Erk…"

Guriko's resolve wavered. She turned and grasped the glass - but she still shook her head forcibly.

"No, I can't. School taught me alcohol is bad for the human body!"

"Oho, you're so cute! You're such a goodie-good, so obedient to teachers. Don't worry. The power of the Apple can maintain your liver. You won't damage your body just from drinking."

Mina said with a half-smile on her face: "Oh? Could it be that – you've never tasted alcohol before?"

Guriko stood still and expressionless.

"Er…"

"Ahahah! The world-famous Gankyū Eguriko-sama is afraid of this liquid made from fermented hops? Aha – so cute! Haha, you're really a Guriko-baby. You're never going to grow up, always staying a short little child!"

"Ehhhhh….!"

Under Mina's full-out challenge, Guriko's expression became stiff and looked unhappy, and pouted her lips.

Seeing the two of them like that, Mitsuki mumbled in a low voice: "big sis's bad personality hasn't changed at all." But Guriko didn't hear this at all.

"Don't look down on me, Sterilization Disinfection! How can I

possibly be scared of a few glasses of beer! Alright – I'll drink it in front of you, I'll drink it with you! And I won't get drunk like you!"

Gulp. She took a big gulp after taking up the glass. Guriko couldn't help but frown. It tasted awful. She poured the mixture of beer and tea into her belly all at once and put the glass down onto the coffee table.

"Woah, keep going! Awesome, awesome!" Mitsuki clapped her hands emotionlessly and looked at Mitsuki. "… Ki-chan, Guriko-baby didn't seem to have drunk enough. Come and pour some more alcohol for her."

"Eh? But –"

"Erm… Erk… Guriko-baby, hurry and leave! This is big sis's sly trap!"

Mitsuki muttered this as she opened another can of beer and filled up Guriko's glass as her big sister ordered. Guriko looked sideways with a challenging look at Mina, and once again drank the entire content in one gulp.

This really challenges the taste, and it tastes awful. And – her body was somehow getting hotter. Her head was getting dizzy and she couldn't think.

"Oho, hoho, ohohoho –"

Mina made a terrifying laugh and kept shaking Guriko from left to right, her face full of excitement.

"… I heard from the Meat Doll Hino that she used sleeping pills to put Guriko-baby to sleep - Guriko-baby really have no resistance to these things. So how does it feel to not think about anything at all? That's the so-called feeling of being drunk."

Guriko's face was fully red and she opened her eyes hazily.

"…Cauld water, gimme, some cauld water…"

"The way you talk is so weird. Ahh - you're so cute! I'm so excited. Gankyū Eguriko is really drunk and her face is so red -" Mina grabbed hold of Guriko, who was wobbling, and poured canned beer straight into Guriko's mouth while laughing loudly.

That sadistic laugh was positively that of a devil.

“Come, come, let me see how you look when you are drunk! Don’t think about anything else and lemme see your cute face!”

“Waaa - awaaaa～!”

Mitsuki stretched out her hand and forcibly pulled away Guriko, who was letting Mina have her way with her. Mitsuki’s face was so upset it was almost green.

“Big sis’s bad habits are back again. All you know is how to bully people! Big sis is so naughty! Stop it, Guriko-baby is so pitiable!”

“Don’t stand in my way, Ki-chan. Even if the person hindering me is my own sister, I won’t let you… Hey, Guriko-baby, keep drinking, stop thinking…”

“Gulp…”

Mina kept shaking Guriko. Guriko, who was completely drunk, shook her hand and tried to resist. “Nuu, duun’t wanna, duun’t wanna.”

“What are you talking about? I don’t understand you at all!”

“Uuuuurgh - “

Guriko finally fainted in her drunkenness and fell down onto the coffee table with a *bam*, and fell deeply asleep. Her careless expression was just like that of a little animal, and her breathing sounded even and peaceful.

“And now - “

Once she made sure Guriko was sound asleep, Mina looked at Mitsuki, who was glaring at her in shock.

“Do you understand, Ki-chan? It’s just as we planned - let’s prepare for ‘that’ once Gankyū Eguriko falls asleep.”

“… Big sis is really a devil.” Mitsuki’s expression became gloomy, which was rare for her, and mumbled. Mina, at the meantime, laughed loudly and merrily.

"… Mmm?"

When Guriko woke up, she saw that she was dressed in a long dress with red silk decorations, and she felt like she was still in a dream. Her head was remarkably heavy and her thoughts were confused. The unendurable smell of alcohol lingered on her breath.

"Big sis, Gu-Gu seemed to have woken up."

She heard Mitsuki's voice.

Who is Gu-Gu? What a disgusting name - Guriko thought this confusedly. Suddenly, a chilling fear overwhelmed her, and she woke with a start. This - was not a dream? The feeling of the dress on her skin was so vivid, and Mitsuki's voice did not sound like a mirage at all.

She tried to move her body and felt waves of motion.

It was very dark around her. Light music was coming from somewhere in the background.

This was - where was…?

"Gu-Gu, are you ok? Still drunk? You just need to wait for your liver to get rid of the alcohol. Mmm, would you like some tea to recover faster?"

"…"

She could tell Mitsuki was eagerly trying to help her, but she couldn't tell where the other was. Guriko still felt really dizzy, and her hand touched a drink bottle full with tea.

"Urk…"

Like Mitsuki said, the raging alcohol in her body was gradually getting digested. As she drank the ice cold tea, she was starting to feel much better. As she looked at her surroundings, Guriko finally realized she was sitting in a car.

They seemed to be in a rental car. It was small but moderately comfortable. She was lying across the backseat, and Mina was sitting seriously in front of the steering wheel, while Mitsuki was

sitting in the passenger's seat and looking at Guriko worriedly - that seemed to sum it up. Where were they? Why did they get her onto the car? Where were they driving to? Why was she asleep? - Numerous answers emerged in her head, but there was something even more incredulous. Guriko sought for that 'something' in her mind.

"… Hey, mouse, why did you put such a disgusting dress on me?"

"Mouse? Me?" Mitsuki tucked her braid into her hat with round ears and opened her eyes wide. "Uuu - what to do… I, I don't know what to say - big sis can explain this!"

"… I'm driving. Don't talk to me."

Mina replied impolitely. There was something wrong with how she handled the steering wheel. Perhaps she was not yet proficient in driving.

Mina and Mitsuki were dressed in the same splendid kind of gowns as Guriko, but they were driving a rather ordinary and cheap car. Were they going to a ball? Why would they wear such strange clothes?

"Chuu～ Oh well. Lemme explain it for you."

Wearing a magnificent long dress but still wearing her hat, tail, and giant gloves, Mitsuki began to explain with some difficulty. "Do you still remember those pictures of the large building before we got drunk?"

"Aaa - yes."

Although the scent of alcohol still lingered in the air and her memories still seemed fuzzy, Guriko remembered it.

It was the building where Single Room would head towards almost every night.

Mitsuki continued after she saw Guriko nod.

"After a brief investigation, we found something like an underground ball happening every night there. It's a really really chaotic party with gambling, violence, prostitution, and all sorts of stuff like that."

"…"

How did these guys manage to find out about this suspicious stuff? It wasn't legal, so it must have been held in secret. Maybe they caught someone who went to this party and questioned him. Guriko couldn't be bothered to figure these things out, but there was one thing she was very concerned with.

That should be the main issue.

"Does Single Room go to that party every night?"

"That is only our guess. That's the only event that happens every night in this building, so the possibility is very high. So we're going to dress like this and secretly join that party, and we can contact Single Room if we're lucky enough. That's our goal for today~" Mitsuki smiled brilliantly at her, while Guriko started to look over the dress she had on her.

"But – even if we want to disguise ourselves, do we need to wear such extravagant clothing? We can hide on the rooftop and secretly observe…"

"Mmm, we did consider that. However, that building was thoroughly covered by surveillance and had guards, so it will be near impossible to observe while in hiding. Although we can use the power of our Fragment to twist cause and effect and go join the party that way, this is much safer."

Both Mina and Mitsuki had a Grater Fragment of God within their body, and Guriko also had a Lesser Fragment named 'Apple' within her that granted her immortality – those contained the power to twist cause and effect and create miracles.

One example would be how she managed to study at a high school without any proof of residence or of her identity.

Although Guriko never tried, it should also be useful to get into parties like this.

As she thought this, Mina suddenly turned around and looked at Guriko unblinkingly with a smile.

"Just give up already. I knew you would hate it, that's why I got you into that dress while you were passed out drunk. It's a very formal party, so it will be too incongruous for you to sneak in

dressed in your everyday clothes. It can't be helped."

"It's fine, it's fine. This really suits Guriko~ Chuu, so cute~"

"…" Guriko furrowed her brows and looked at her bothersome dress.

Her arms and legs couldn't move freely. It would be troublesome if they started a fight – Guriko sighed as she thought this. It was just like old times. She was incapable of thinking like a normal human girl. But that was fine. It should be fine. She had decided to go back to being a monster. She didn't need to be cute. She never wanted to be treated like a girl.

"…"

Why did her chest hurt? It was as if she lost something important to her without realizing it, as if she lost her soul.

She shook her head.

"…So, we're going to find Single Room at that party? A red-head boy with canine teeth – that should be easy."

"Mmm, provided Tatsu-chan and Mi-chan's evidence were correct. We didn't see him ourselves after all. Traces of his passing, supernatural killing intent – we need to pay attention to all sorts of things too. My memories were rather fuzzy when Single Room showed up, because my 'fixation' was getting removed…"

'Tatsu-chan' was Kuroki Tatsue, and 'Mi-chan' was Takamikado Mitaka. They couldn't do much when it comes to fighting, and Guriko didn't want them to be involved in this, so they were not a part of the operation to find Single Room.

Even so, she had a basic understanding of the situation already.

"I understand. It's not that dangerous. We just need to search and find Single Room."

"… Don't be careless, Gankyū Eguriko." Mina pronounced her ominous name evenly. "The people taking care of this building are the group that once operated the Eternal Institute – the Sakaki Organization."

This skyscraper hosted secret parties and was a hotel at the same time. The Sakaki Organization was a world-famous conglomeration and everything from the interior décor to the people coming in and out of the building exuded an aura of elegance and nobility.

But it was impossible to see such things from where he was.

“Nom – nom – nom.” A humming sound and the sharp sound of chewing something hard reverberated in the narrow ventilation duct. A boy was lazily lying in this narrow space, where an average adult couldn’t even fit in and only children could barely squeeze into. He was chewing something in his mouth. The sound of crunching was coming from his puffed-up cheeks.

“… Bah, bah! Urgh, this won’t do. It’s tough and hard to eat; it’s terrible. It took so much effort for me to find it - damn it, I thought this apple was just the right size and good to chew on.”

It was an apple-shaped decoration made of solid gold and emanated an enchanting aura, and it looked very realistic.

But now there was drool on it and, to make it more horrifying, there were even teeth marks on it. If it could be returned to how it was before and sold in the market, it would fetch a lot of money.

The boy who patrolled the roof and the ventilation ducts like a ninja happened to find this object.

This thing was hidden in secret, which piqued his curiosity. It was only a decoration however, even though he went to such lengths to find it. Maybe it was someone’s private property, but these fiscal matters did not interest Kajiri.

“It can’t be helped. Never mind - I got it after so much effort, so I should give it to Breako later. She’s very poor, so if she sold this it should provide her with some money to live by for a while.” The boy looked at the apple, which glowed with an incredible light in the darkness.

“Oh -”

There seemed to be some words carved on the apple. L, O, V, E, S, O, N, G. The boy furrowed his brows. Although he tried very hard

to decipher it, he immediately gave up because it was too troublesome.

“Can’t read it. I don’t even understand much Japanese, how can I understand this?!”

He wiped the apple with his clothes and yawned, impolitely revealling the canine teeth in his mouth. He then tied the apple to a thin string and hung it around his neck. This way, he won’t forget the apple again.

“… Oh? Some rare folks arrived.”

The boy, who was given the strange name Nikuyama Kajiri and lived with the foreign woman Breaksun Hanselmine in the decrepit apartment, showed a nervous expression.

The signature red hair crowned his annoyed face. He was wearing a T-shirt and jeans entirely too big for him. A decoration hang off his neck, and it looked like something between a crucifix and a knife. That was the only thing that did not match his unfashionable looks.

“Sterilization Disinfection - and Unpleasant Counter-Current?”

The boy revealed his canine teeth again and made a low whine like a small animal that was threatened.

“And then there is - ” His expression suddenly became one of surprise. “Who’s this person?”

Sterilization Disinfection, Unpleasant Counter-Current; the Greater Fragments with these names has enormous presences and could not be ignored.

What was their goal? Him, or Breaksun? Or were they after Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, who was hiding somewhere within this building?

- No matter what… “This person is not a Greater Fragment, but… but, but this person is too strong! What, what thing is this?”

A strange aura walked beside the two Greater Fragments. It was not an existence like a Greater Fragment - and this person’s flesh was not like Ultimate Shield
The Weakest

when he was under disguise, nor like the terminals of God Mushi Emperor. No matter how those individuals changed their appearance, their aura would never change.

Kajiri became interested in that strange existence. Slowly, he took hold of the crucifix hanging from his neck.

It was very dark all around him.

He could not see anything in here. It was like he was sitting inside the void, where he could not feel anything. Though he was still lying in the ventilation duct where filthy air was passing through very quickly, the boy became alarmed like that of a beast.

Ever since Breaksun disappeared on that night, he began to notice that she would go out every dusk. No, not just at dusk, but also at around daybreak, during the day, or night. Time did not matter.

These kind of disappearances kept happening.

Breaksun was not someone who could hide things. Kajiri understood this.

It was precisely because of this that Kajiri was particularly concerned about her strange behavior.

"…"

Was he being betrayed again? Was he being cheated? Were they after him for revenge? He found it hard to imagine Breaksun tricking him. She was a good girl. However, due to his experience with being locked up for hundreds of years in the gloomy forest, Kajiri became extremely anxious.

He needed to endure this. He needed to pretend that nothing was happening, like when he was living with Breaksun.

However, he finally could not endure it anymore, and Kajiri began to follow her.

The focus of his chase was this building. She would go silent every time she saw this skyscraper. He didn't know why this building was built and how people regarded it. All he knew was that Breaksun was here doing something, and recently he realized it also had something to do with Melodia Noise
Tear Song

. In order to discover all this, Kajiri began his investigations.

Kajiri detested himself for having doubts towards Breaksun, who had saved him. But it was more terrifying to be betrayed. If he was betrayed again, his mind would definitely crumble completely, unable to take this.

“Hmmm.”

With a small sound, Kajiri pierced the back of his own hand with the sharp, knife-like end of the crucifix without hesitation.

Then, incredibly, his blood spluttered out - and then, as if it was conscious, the drops of blood wriggled along the ventilation duct, as if each of them was a small snake or an incredulous swarm of insects.

Kajiri’s bodily fluids began to move towards every corner of the building and started to send all sorts of information back to him such as temperature, humidity, and the components in the air. It also included visual information such as the ladies and gentlemen strolling and chatting around the building, and the all various delicacies being transported here. A party seemed to take place in this building every night.

Apart from his target and the bystanders, Kajiri’s blood also discovered the Greater Fragments. One was a beautiful woman with white hair tied up in a braid. The other was a young short girl in a magnificent dress and a strange hat. And also -

“Welcome to my room.” Without any emotion, Kajiri murmured lowly. “Sterilization Disinfection. Unpleasant Counter-Current. And -”

As if his opponent was right in front of him, Kajiri asked with a light smile: “Just what are you?”

And the girl faraway suddenly lifted up her head, as if she felt Kajiri’s presence.

“…”

Guriko suddenly lifted up her head as if she felt someone called out to her. Although she concentrated hard and tried to feel and hear for anyone nearby, she still could not be sure. Perhaps she still hasn't completely woken up from her drunkenness. She blinked, and moved her gaze back to the party. Guriko still didn't quite understand what these magnificent and luxurious activities mean.

The splendid decorations, the melodious music, and the outlandish performances; the people gathered here seemed to have removed their ordinary masks. Even actors who could often be seen on TV and clerics who were frequently named in the news were all sinking into madness here without care.

Overall, she felt it was a group of extraordinary people gathered here simply for the sake of more excitement.

All of them had unusual smiles and easily made conversations on economics or politics. In general, it was a place she was not comfortable with.

The room was very spacious, and the huge floor was covered with thick rugs. Self-service machines stood everywhere laden with drinks, and trays of lavish food dotted the room. The people conversed in formal attire, emitting a sense of nobility.

The stage was set opposite the entrance and there were very few people in its vicinity. That was where Guriko's group stood. They did not eat and did not talk to others, as if preserving a little bit of consciousness in this completely different world.

"Pornographic. Perverted. Waste of time."

Something was happening on the stage, where distasteful light and sound effect was being employed. There was the occasional scream of "Monster! Frog-man!". A strange man with distorted elbows and knees was being displayed. Mina looked at that monstrosity and mumbled without any interest.

"I heard it was a perverted performance by perverts, so I did come here with a little expectation - Mmm, it's just something like this. There's nothing interesting."

"… That's what you think. I am feeling thoroughly disgusted."

Guriko replied.

These things were indeed too ordinary for Mina, who was skilled in creating perverted monsters such as Meat Dolls. These things could not satisfy her. However, this was a blatant act of crime for any ordinary person.

People kept appearing on the stage. Humans with all sorts of malformations were being introduced to the audience. They were given outrageous names such as mermaid, dog-man, demon… their dignity as humans were totally annihilated. If the human rights organizations heard about this, this place would probably be wiped out even if they have to resort to terrorist methods.

What was different between ordinary people and these malformed people? Were only ordinary humans permitted to live happily in this world? Guriko had been told by kind people that this was not the case, but she once again sank into anxiety when she saw the scene before her.

The right arm that she had lost gave off a phantom pain and she furrowed her brows. Then she heard a singing voice.

"_"

It was a tired and mundane voice.

She looked up at the stage. The horrendous scene had finished and a singer, who she might have seen somewhere before, appeared on the stage and was straining her voice in song. Where had she seen this woman before? Perhaps on the TV.

Guriko doesn't quite understand music. She didn't quite understand what was being sung, and she didn't feel touched when she heard melodies. Guriko only liked to stay quietly by herself. Singing was a loud business, and that was why she hated it.

The woman on the stage was dressed in a lavish dress and roared out superfluous lyrics that meant nothing - Guriko really hated such scenes. All this talk about love and lovers… what a bother.

"… I hate the sound of singing."

"Oh, what a coincidence! I agree. I hate it too." Mina replied. She, on the other hand, had already gotten used to these surroundings as they searched for Single Room. Mitsuki, who was yelling "But I like it!", was completely ignored.

“I remember when I was in elementary school and we had to sing because it was a compulsory class. We didn’t want to sing at all because we don’t have any thoughts or emotions we wanted to express through song. But then the teacher said those who didn’t sing were all bad children. I was so upset to hear that!”

“That’s right. Why do things like songs even exist? And musical instruments, too.”

Guriko sighed with a serious expression.

“They are so damn loud. I hate it when I was trying to think and the loud sound of music suddenly pops up. If I’m strolling in town or went shopping and I heard loud singing, I would get very upset. Shouldn’t you just talk if you want to communicate? How can something like song communicate anything?”

She said this in a low voice that was full of spite. Suddenly -

“… That’s not true.” She heard a voice. It was a happy female voice mixed in the sound of singing.

“–?”

Guriko was startled and looked towards the voice. She didn’t notice this person at all, not even with the power of her Fragment. This woman appeared as if from thin air, and none of them had even noticed her presence.

She was sitting on the edge of the stage and dangled her feet off it, but she also seemed to be right next to Guriko’s group. This woman was smiling at them. Incredibly, neither the singer who was singing hoarsely about love and lovers nor the ordinary people around Guriko noticed her existence.

This woman, who remained undetected as if she was a ghost, said with a sing-song and lighthearted voice.

“According to the Bible, God destroyed the Tower of Babel and split the original, unified human language into different languages such as English and Japanese - this disunity made humans incapable of communicating with and understanding each other. However, before the collapse of the Tower of Babel - people communicated in the same language and lived in communal understanding and love.”

The woman smiled prettily and spread out her arms.

“What kind of language was that? I always thought that to be incredible. But it was perhaps – no, it definitely was – music.”

The woman dyed her long hair green and tied it into loose ponytails on both sides of her head. Her hair was fluffy and curled, as if she just rolled out of bed. She was dressed in flamboyant colors and gave out a thoroughly strange and startling impression. A tear-like sticker was stuck below her right eye.

The electric guitar she carried over her right shoulder also had cute stickers all over it.

A dream-like, miraculous color seemed to flow in her eyes.

“A long long long time ago, people communicated through music and songs - would that memory be the reason we are still singing today? Are we singing from the bottom of our hearts in order to get back that feeling of trust and unity we had back then? Is that why we are singing for people other than ourselves to hear?”

“Boom.” Completely ignoring the music already being played on the stage, she struck her guitar.

“Singing is all about love, lovers, friendship. Isn’t every song a song of love that expresses our love for others and our love for the world that others love? Music is the universal language of the entire world - it was the ultimate unified language that connected us all before the collapse of the Tower of Babel. – Really love it~”

Her guitar suddenly made a sharp, loud sound. She sung loudly with a startlingly clear voice: “Really love it~”

The atmosphere of the place suddenly changed.

This disgusting party - this place full of people who lived in an alien world of slaughter gathered - suddenly changed its atmosphere due to the clear song she just produced.

The woman began to sing.

“Really love it~ Really love it— Reaaallly really love it~–”

This sound, like the feeling of electric shocks, began to reverberate. It was an unbelievable experience.

It was as if the world was frozen over. Everyone’s body became

stiff. As if she had cast magic over the entire place, everyone seemed to know her - at the same time, everyone was attracted to this song.

A song that consisted of only one phrase.

It had nothing to do with her rhythm. She was just singing something random, but it was enough to shake everyone's heart. What was happening?

Soon, even language ceased to appear in her music - "Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa～" It was just a sound, that was all.

"–!!"

This fleeting gratitude - there was a wish that wanted to express these feelings. This definitely exists. The people in this world were still searching for it and wanting to express it. This was the primordial language that disappeared with the destruction of the Tower of Babel, the language that could communicate with anyone in the world.

Songs.

A song of love.

A pure and absolute language that expressed thought and emotions in their rawest form.

Guriko was stunned. Mina and Mitsuki also could not speak. The ladies and gentlemen around them were all standing dazed, and the original singer in the middle of the stage also fell silent as if ashamed.

"～—!! Ah—"

Unbelievably, tears rolled down her cheeks.

This warm liquid was rolling down her cheeks and dripping down her jaw. Was she crying? Why?

Guriko lowered her head.

She wanted to be loved. She wanted to have a full life. She hated being alone - the weak parts in Guriko's heart was being drowned out by the singing voice of the unknown woman.

Really love it. This innocent emotion was being spread everywhere.

“~——!”

Her string was echoing as it was being plucked.

Guriko felt her heart was being gorged out, as if all the bones in her body were being melted. She could not move. Guriko collapsed into a chair and could not stop her tears. For the first time in her life, she wanted to voice a wish, and she wanted to say she loves someone.

Music wasn’t anyone’s private property. Breaksun felt that no one needed permission to sing.

Anyone could just open their mouth and sing if they want to. That was how Breaksun was. She sung whenever she wanted to.

She lost her father in endless confusion and tears when she was still young. Her father gave Breaksun many mothers, many younger siblings, and infinite love. She no longer remembered what he looked like, but his disappearance made huge changes in Breaksun’s life.

Breaksun fell into the curse of being unable to make connections with other people every since his disappearance. She had cursed him and this world many times over. Why could she not make friends with anybody?

She began to sing to herself at street corners out of the unbearable loneliness. No one would notice her anyways, and she didn’t feel embarrassed. However, she was still hoping someone would notice her. That strong emotion filled her entire being.

She wanted to pass on her emotions onto someone.

She wanted someone to look at her. That was her only wish. That person didn’t need to do anything. He only needs to quietly listen to her talk.

Incredibly, people only noticed her when she sung.

According to Kajiri’s later explanation, Breaksun would only control her power, which had always been out of her control, when she was singing. Only then could she manage to link her own cause and effect with that of others.

Why did it only happen when she was singing? And what is this ‘cause and effect’? She didn’t understand. Breaksun thought it was probably because she wanted to connect with someone. She was so lonely. She wanted to talk to people. She wanted to be close to people. She wanted friends. She wanted a lover. She wanted a family. At the end, humans could not live on their own. Humans were like this both physically and mentally.

Therefore, Breaksun kept singing without regard for anything else.

Like a lonely bird that kept singing in order to find a mate, she kept giving out songs with which she wanted to be heard by someone, that she wanted to affect a heart.

“You are not bad. This is the first time I heard such a genuine singing voice.”

She was somehow given the title ‘Kingdom of Witches’ and had beome a legend amongst street musicians. A mumbling voice came to her one day.

“What a pity - you are completely oblivious of your own miracle. Would you like to use your power in a more meaningful way, Witch?”

The existence named Joker laughed as if it was an incorporeal wraith.

She heard a thunderous applause. The audience that gathered up to her clapped their hands in ecstasy and gave out yells of surprise. They did not conceal their gratitude at all and expressed all of it as if they were simple children. No matter their gender, no matter their social positions, they were all touched by her song as living humans.

Guriko was no exception. She could not move, as if her feet were firmly nailed into the floor. Mitsuki relaxed when she saw this, and started to clap loudly too.

Whereas Mina -

“- Urk.”

Mina was the only one who retained a solemn expression in this space filled with ecstasy. Guriko was also very puzzled by her expression.

What was wrong - why did she look so scary?

“This power forcibly linked people’s minds with her own cause and effect - this is the power of her voice. How did I only discover this now? This feeling of a Greater Fragment -”

Mina suddenly screamed.

“…Poison
Catastrophe
!”

“Urk -” The woman singing on the side of the stage suddenly looked scared. “How did you - ” The woman said in a low voice.

Mina looked as if she made a correct guess and leapt up. The pristine white long dress she wore flew like the wings of a butterfly. The crowd started to stir. Guriko was also no longer entranced. Mina ran up to the green-haired woman and grasped her like a beast.

“Single Room was looking for Poison
Catastrophe
- Do, do you know Single Room?!”

“_”

The woman, who had previously looked nonchalant, froze when she heard this.

Guriko opened her eyes wide and stared at the stage as she starting to think.

Poison
Catastrophe
? That seemed to be a Greater Fragment of equal standing with Mina and Mitsuki. What was that splendid voice? She didn’t feel any malevolence or enmity in it -

But Poison
Catastrophe
was indeed the unknown Greater Fragment that Single Room was looking for. It was as Mina said.

Could it be that Poison
Catastrophe

was also looking for Single Room and she was waiting for him here?

“Huh, huh -”

The woman started to scream pitifully and hugged her head. Guriko didn’t understand what was going on. Mina stretched out her hand and grabbed the front of the woman’s dress, and forcibly pulled her up.

- Bam! There was an enormous sound of explosion. Guriko looked up at the ceiling, where the sound came from.

“Woah - “

Dust flew everywhere and rubble rained down from above. A red object dropped down like a comet.

“Mina, watch out!” Guriko screamed.

Mina looked up and yelled as she tried to dodge, but she was too late.

The shockwave of the collapsing ceiling threw her against the wall.

“Big sis!”

Mitsuki screamed and jumped up to the stage, wanting to catch Mina. But then Mina, still with flames of anger in her eyes, Mitsuki, and Guriko, all froze in shock.

The woman who was saved from Mina was also surprised.

“Kajiri…?”

“Mmm. Don’t worry, Breako.”

A red-haired boy smiled and said this, revealing his canine teeth. He held a crucifix in his right hand and his palm was somehow bleeding. His rusty blood stained the crucifix sanguineous red, and it pulsed with a chilling red light.

He was…

“I’m not Breako.” Facing the woman who was calmly correcting him irrespective of the situation, the boy looked slightly upset before giving a sigh. He looked at the three others from head to toe. “Alright, let’s escape. When it comes down to a fight, Single Room

and Poison
Catastrophe
cannot overcome the punishing Sterilization Disinfection and Unpleasant Counter-Current."

"Single Room!" Guriko yelled out.

She found him. She finally found him, this existence that could revert Rinne to how she used to be.

This Greater Fragment that might be able to deliver her salvation in this world full of failures and tragedies -

Single Room.

"Don't look at me like that."

Single Room spoke as he looked back at Guriko, who was looking at him with great sorrow in her eyes.

"… I am not God."

The party was full of chaos. There were wails and roars, curses and shouts. All sorts of sounds merged into a riot and exploded like a fireball. Feeling the confused and dangerous atmosphere, the people all ran away. Amongst them, the boy called Kajiri ran forward while holding on to the hand of the green-haired woman.

It was like a knight protecting a princess. Apart from being somewhat lacking in the quality of their outfit, everything else seemed quite similar.

"Um, um – Kajiri, the performance isn't over yet…"

The woman was still somewhat confused and her electrical guitar had also fallen to the ground, and she was running rather awkwardly. The boy named Kajiri did not reply to her and kept running towards the exit while holding to her hand.

"…Damn it. Single Room and Poison
Catastrophe
are already allies? He misunderstood the way I wanted to grab Poison
Catastrophe
just then and got a really bad impression of us." Mina clicked her tongue and took out her spray cans. "Oh well – I can't change the

past… don't let them run away."

She made the declaration with a low voice and stretched one spray can out in an angle. "Type B - Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
!" There was a sound of explosion, like the explosion of a glass with acid in it, and something invisible sprayed out in front of Mina.

Mina was Sterilization Disinfection – the Greater Fragment with the power to eliminate and fixate everything. Guriko had once fought to the death against her; she knew her abilities better than anybody.

"…I'm going on ahead. You should follow up quickly too." Mina yelled at Mitsuki and Guriko, who were standing next to her. She sprayed Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
as she leapt onto the ground, then she jumped on top of the very space that was solidified by Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
and passed secretly above the frightened masses people.

"Woah!" Guriko was very unhappy with Mina's unrealistic behaviors that involved buying time through using the riotous and confused crowds here. "You Greater Fragments are just like usual, just a bunch of monsters!"

"Oho – I'm actually not that agile." Mina smiled in an alluring way as she kept moving forwards and her long skirt fluttered.

"Ahh~ Big sis is so awesome! But everyone can see your panties~" Mitsuki was completely oblivious to the current situation and yelled happily.

Guriko was trying to get past the crowds of people running everywhere due to the unnatural events that happened. Mitsuki went up and grabbed her shoulder.

"…What, mouse?"

"I'm not very good with starting a fight, so Guriko-baby will need to help big sis~ Please~ We're launching! Guriko-baby, launch~"

Without any further explanations, Mitsuki lifted Guriko up with her monstrous strength and threw her.

"Aaaah –" Guriko flew straight towards Single Room. Her skirt

flapped around her, and things kept whirling in her vision. Guriko slammed straight into Mina and the two of them tumbled into a mess.

Kajiri ran away with Poison
Catastrophe
during that time.

Mina stood up abruptly as she pulled on her long skirt with difficulty, and yelled angrily: “What the heck – what were you doing?!”

“I’m sorry! But it’s entirely your younger sister’s fault!”

Mitsuki was trying her hardest to get near the other two. She was squeezing through the riotous crowds with great difficulty due to her short stature.

Her ability was a protective kind and was as good as an amateur in an offensive fight, therefore she did not plan to join in the battle from the start.

The two of them walked out of the door of the room and began to look for Single Room.

“That’s Poison
Catastrophe
! Let’s catch up to her – ”

“But… where’s Single Room?”

The red-haired boy who was beside Poison
Catastrophe
a while ago had disappeared. Mina’s eyes widened when she heard Guriko’s remainder – and her neck suddenly began to spurt out blood.

“- Urk…?!”

Mina was stunned and she fumbled to reach for her own neck. Her cranial artery seemed to have been cut open – her warm blood spurted out fiercely in an unbelievable shade of red. It sprayed everywhere and stained the lavishly decorated corridor.

It was undoubtedly a lethal wound for an ordinary human, but Mina was very calm. She ignored the cold sweat that seeped out of

her forehead and used her fingers to press down on the wound as she took out a spray can with skull decorations.

It was Type-A – Genocide Justice
Annihilation Mist
.

It was a diabolical mist that can completely annihilate anything it touched. Guriko's right arm was completely consumed due to this power and never managed to recover.

"You - !"

Mina screamed as she sprayed Genocide Justice
Annihilation Mist
towards the ceiling. A silver mist, like the shadow of a hoard of insects, exploded upwards –

The sparkling chandelier on the ceiling suddenly snapped and fell towards Single Room, who was standing underneath it.

"Mina!"

No! Single Room would die - Guriko couldn't help but yell as she realized this. Single Room jumped down from the ceiling and barely managed to escape from the mist that fell down from above him.

With a 'bam', the chandelier fell on the ground. Single Room moved back a little and put some distance between him and Mina.

Mina used Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
to close her wound and temporarily stopped her bleeding. Once 'fixed' by her mist, her wound stayed in the same state and blood no longer flew out. Although she would not die from blood loss due to her status as a Greater Fragment, her brain would still shut down and faint if she lost too much blood.

"A knife - such an ordinary weapon?"

Guriko took out her spoon as she confirmed the current situation. Single Room used his crucifix-like knife to cut open Mina's throat as he leapt down from above. The weapon he used was truly unbelievable.

"Mina, are you okay? You can rest if the wound is too much."

“Are you kidding? It’s only a scratch.” Mina shrugged.

Indeed. Despite the large amount of blood lost, the wound was not a deep one.

It would be more difficult if her hand was cut off or her brain was gorged out. That would be a very severe injury and she would be unable to move.

But it was still not a good idea for them to fight Single Room. After all, their intention was just to obtain his assistance. They must declare their intention first and try to get out of their current situation, where they faced each other as hostile opponents.

“Um…”

Guriko was not good with negotiating. She was unsure of herself, and just tried her hardest to yell with her most genuine voice: “Hold on! Please calm down, Single Room. You are - you are Single Room. right?”

“…”

Probably still on guard, he did not reply to Guriko’s question and only looked toward her with astonishment.

“… I know of Sterilization Disinfection and Unpleasant Counter-Current, but who are you?”

“Gankyū Eguriko.”

“What an odd name.”

“Shut up! Don’t underestimate me - Um…” Suddenly remembering that they should not make him upset, Guriko nodded rather stiffly. “…It, it is an odd name.”

“Then I’ll call you Ganko?”

“Don’t use that kind of nickname - um, er, ok, Ganko is fine.” She seemed to have gone off on a tangent.

Mina, whose dress was stained with blood and was lying on the ground, stood up next to Guriko. “Stop wasting your breath. Let me do this.”

Mina, with her pristine white dress stained red with her blood, said

clearly to Single Room: “Single Room, we do not wish to fight. Please calm down and listen to me.”

“…”

Single Room looked at Guriko and then looked at Mina with a glance full of doubt.

“… Wasn’t it you who attacked first?”

“See? All thanks to your actions, Single Room is upset. What are you doing to do now, Mina?”

Mina looked sideways at Guriko upon the other’s questions. Her face looked as if she was going to ask Guriko just exactly which side the latter was on.

“Anyways -” Mina closed her eyes and stretched her hand out as if with an invitation. “I would like to ask you some things, Single Room.”

She then looked at Guriko, who looked concerned, and added with a bitter smile.

“Indeed, we also hope you can help us with your power.”

“…”

Single Room moved his head a little, looking as if he was slightly moved.

Guriko became a bit more reassured after seeing this. He was not as hard to communicate with as Mina and the Long-Armed Demon were when they first met, and he did not seem to have hidden agendas like Zekiguchi.

She could tell he was a kind person. At least, she could communicate with him.

However –

“That won’t do.”

A sound suddenly appeared.

The figure of a woman appeared incongruously, as if she literally popped out of thin air. She has mirage-like green hair, had a tear-

shaped sticker on her face and was dressed outrageously – was it Poison Catastrophe, who should have ran away?

“Breaksun?!”

Single Room did not anticipate her appearance either and he opened his eyes wide in shock,

“Ah, you got my name right this time. Good good. I am indeed called Breaksun.”

The woman named Breaksun said those unimportant things slowly as she turned to the others.

Breaksun – that name sounded familiar…

Guriko seemed to remember something, but then she lost it again.

“I’m sorry.”

Breaksun pushed down Single Room’s head as she bowed, looking veritably like a mother with her young child.

“Kajiri’s power hurts him very much when he uses it. It hurts so much, as if he would die. So, please, let him go.”

Guriko seemed to have heard her voice before. Where? Yet she was certain she had never met her before. Was this Poison Catastrophe’s power? Guriko was confused. Most importantly, she said Single Room’s ability would hurt him? That would be bad. Guriko was willing to pay any price, even including her own life, to get Single Room to help her. However –

“Therefore… Hmm…”

Breaksun stood up and lifted up Single Room in her arms. She then lowered her head again and said: “I am sorry.”

“Eh? B – Breako?”

Holding Single Room, who wriggled about in her arms like a little animal, Breaksun broke off into a run. Her figure instantly disappeared. She completely evaporated in front of them, as if she melted into thin air.

“Poison
Catastrophe
’s reversal of cause and effect –” Mina muttered to herself.

Guriko didn’t understand Mina at all. They must chase –

“Big sis~ Guriko-baby~ Did you catch Single Room?” Mitsuki, who finally made it out of the room, asked as she ran towards them.

Guriko held spoons in her hand and clutched her long skirt as she ran along the corridor. She must not let him escape. Her salvation was so near at hand – this was perhaps the last hope to turn Rinne back to normal.

Like a mortal beseeching a god, Gankyū Egoriko stretched out her hand towards the direction Single Room had disappeared.

Symphony 3: Crybaby Joker

Every child in the depths of the alley had a great name. There were five children named Jesus, three named Washington, even two who were called Hitler. These powerful names were the only consolation for children struggling in poverty, names that might bring them happiness in the future.

Joker was also born in the depth of the alleyway.

There were countless abandoned children in the ghetto, which were taken for granted in the dark corners of the prosperous country. At least Joker's mother took care of her. Her mother loved men, gambling, and money, and named her child Joker after the most powerful card in the set thanks to the inspiration she got from divination. However, contrary to the clown on the card, Joker rarely laughed and didn't make others laugh either. A girl named Moon was one of the rare children she had a cordial relationship with.

Moon said: "I will become the happiest person in the world."

Joker ignored all the children in the alley except her.

Moon had unique eyes. Some said her eyes were full of hope, some said they were the eyes of heroes, but Joker thought her eyes were dangerous – like those of a wolf.

"What's your dream, Joker?"

Moon, this girl with ambition in her heart, who lived as if she was burning her soul at both ends every second, only got a nonchalant reply from Joker.

"… Nothing." Joker replied with a dry and low voice. "I just want to live quietly."

That was the kind of child she was.

Her father died.

In fact, Joker only knew of her father's identity when he died.

Her prostitute mother was the only person who stayed beside her from the moment she was born. She never realized she had other

relatives apart from her mother.

Apparently her parents started arguing before she was born. Although they did not divorce, they were separated - or rather, her mother left the house in a childish fit and started to live in the ghetto.

Whether because of the argument or because she didn't like Joker, even her mother only came to see her once in a while, and the woman never felt guilty about it.

As such, Joker never had much in the way of emotion ever since she was young.

She always felt there was a thin veil between the world and her.

Life in the ghetto was very hard and sad. Joy and happiness – such beautiful emotions had nothing to do with this place. Here, one could spend one's entire life in sorrow and pain.

Would it feel like death if one lived without emotions?

She never really lived, therefore she couldn't die just yet. It was a miracle to be born into this world, therefore she believed she must feel happy at least once. Wouldn't it be a waste to be born, otherwise?

She didn't want to die, but she wasn't alive either.

That was how Joker was as a child.

… Her late father, who had a complicated relationship with her mother, was apparently a priest at the local church and used to live in the grandiose building.

Joker's mother brought her back to live in that place after Joker's father died, back to that empty place regarded as the home of happiness.

Her mother was unemployed and drowned herself in pleasure with men.

The holy residence of God was only a playground for her mother.

Joker wanted to escape from the sounds her mother made with strange men and the chaotic sound of people sitting at the gambling table, and she learned to live in the shadows. She taught herself to

read from thoroughly perusing the only book in that place – the Holy Bible.

She learnt to write according to God's commandments without realizing it herself. If she lived a good life, she would certainly be called to the side of the Lord, right? She wasn't particularly touched, but her tears would not stop flowing. Even if she died, she would never be able to attain Heaven – that was her belief. Live a good life – what did that even mean?

There were little cubicles in the church called 'confessionals' for people to confess their sins to God, with a priest sitting inside speaking words of absolution and forgiveness, granting salvation to the penitent.

However, ever since her father died, the church had effectively stopped functioning. Even so, there were still wayward travellers who wandered in. Some people living in the vicinity would come to the church every day as if it were a job, old ladies in particular.

People would come in almost every day to talk about their troubles.

Some said that they had sinned. Some said they had discovered their evil natures. Some said they had hurt someone else.

It wasn't just confessions. There were more questions from these lost souls than their desire to repent.

Some asked where they would go when they died. Some asked whether their souls would be saved. Some asked whether their sins would be forgiven.

Joker was just a little kid in the depth of the alley. She was not a priest or a nun, and she didn't understand.

Perhaps even God Himself wouldn't be able to understand. Human lives had no value here. People died every moment as if they were trash. If there were really souls, then Heaven would have been filled up long ago.

The confessional was soundproof so she couldn't hear the disgusting sounds her mother made, so Joker liked to go there. But there were equally repulsive human sounds in there. There were way too many people seeking salvation.

God, please help me.

God, please save me.

God, please bless me.

Who were they praying to? God did not exist here. Joker, who lived here, knew this better than anybody.

However, as a prank and also as a duty, Joker sometimes replied to people's confessions according to the words her father left behind. She memorized phrases from the Bible and gave out blessings with words such as "I forgive your sins', and the people would leave with satisfied expressions on their faces. What exactly was God doing? People were in such pain, and where was God, what was He doing? Why did God never save us? Joker prayed everyday with her hands held up high like a nun. Although she felt those who came to confess were foolish, they would feel lonely if God never ever replied, right? She could at least let them hear a voice to prove that there was a God, that there was something, anything out there.

But the people were never going to be saved.

Joker eventually made this a part of her daily life and gradually forgot the life she led in the depths of the alleyway. That was when the most perfect and most lonely man in the world appeared. The man who stepped into the church – the man who called himself Sakaki Ganhō – asked a straightforward question as soon as he opened his mouth.

"I want to ask if God really exists."

This question was far too serious. Joker answered without thinking: "Maybe not –"

Do you know of the Tower of Babel?

You come from an island nation from the Far East, so you may not have heard of it – then what about Christianity? The Bible?

Do you know about the legend of Genesis?

You walk into a church where God is said to reside, and you doubt

the existence of the God that watches over this place. Your answer showed that you know nothing of God – you have a personality that is more courageous, or rather more arrogant, than your looks.

You don't seem to have an interest in anything apart from yourself.

Anyways, the Tower of Babel was created by humans who had been cast out of Eden. In order to regain God's blessing, they created a very tall tower with bricks and bitumen in order to return to the sky.

Mmm?

No, this is a legend.

Yes, even children know that those Apollo space shuttles left the atmosphere and went into the sky and there was no Heaven up there.

Mmm – anyways, in order to reach the realm of God, that of Heaven, people created a very tall tower in the legends.

People had a communal language back then. They could communicate easily with one another and live together without conflicts. That was a language more perfect than any other tongue in the current world. People could connect with each other just through talking. They could understand each other and lived comfortably in this understanding.

That was why God disrupted that language.

God refused to allow these foolish humans to approach God's Kingdom too closely. He caused their language to fall into confusion, which caused in-fighting and the eventual collapse of the Tower.

We lost our communal language from that day forth. None of us could ever really understand what others meant anymore. The way to approach God's Kingdom had been forever lost.

Do you understand, man from a distant land? This is what you're doing right now. If you walk too close to God, you'll only be destroyed yourself.

God does not wish to be seen by us, nor does He want us to go near him. We cannot enter Heaven, and therefore we cannot ascertain

His existence.

Yes – indeed. I am surprised that you understood that. If you understood that, then you should stop being interested in whether or not God exists – what did you say?

If God doesn't want us, then you'll become God yourself? Are you an idiot? What an arrogant person – you are not even aware of the imminent punishment coming from Heaven for saying such sinful words.

Oh?

Really?

You're saying God already abandoned us? Then the punishment from Heaven would also – no, what am I talking about? Alright, this is it. It's about time to end the preaching. Hmm – why are you still sitting there? Hurry and go back. This is not a place for an atheist to stay too long.

You like chatting with me? Don't be so foolish! Really, stop when you can. I already told you to go back. You –

Her mother was arrested. It could be because of her men, or because of her gambling, or one of the illegal activities she was engaged in. Joker wasn't particularly surprised. She didn't feel much emotion for her mother, but she kept crying.

It was because the church finally shut down.

Without someone to keep it running, no one wanted to keep the church standing.

The coloured windows were all broken or melted. The confessionals were smashed. Many holy vessels were taken away to other churches. Only the giant crucifix remained.

The construction truck left, and there was nothing here anymore.

It had always been empty since the beginning. This place had always been empty. This planet, this entire world, had always been

empty.

Joker was horrified to face the ruins of the church. She started to cry over this empty piece of land.

She knew that God did not exist, so why did she…

The sound of bells startled her back to reality.

She was spacing out a little. It was very dangerous to be distracted. She would not know what was attacking her or when it started. She would be on the least guard when she was distracted.

"…"

Joker stopped reminiscing about the past with this warning. She was a tall blonde woman with blue eyes, dressed in an incongruous black business suit, and dark sunglasses covered eyes which so often shed tears. The look from her eyes was extremely tender.

The ringing sounds came from the bells tied to Joker's parted blonde hair. There was no wind, and yet they still made a crystal clear sound.

"Mmm. Mmm –"

There was no one else around. No one was here, and no one could accidentally approach her. Joker's surroundings were completely enveloped with an aura of melancholy. As if afraid of getting lost, even birds dared not to approach this place. It was covered in complete silence.

Bathing in the tendrils of sunlight that filtered through the treetops, Joker said to herself in a low voice in this sudden and unnatural space.

"… So Love Song disappeared?"

Her body and mouth moved to converse as if someone was standing in front of her.

"Most likely, someone took her away – he must be an extraordinary

fellow to have found that place… Fool, it's useless to apologize now. Die."

A nonchalant and mumbling voice flew stiffly out of her throat. It was a coarse and ancient voice, as if it changed into someone else's voice as soon as it came into contact with air.

There was no one else next to her, and yet she talked with different expressions as if she was acting.

"Go look for her right now! I suspect someone abnormal might have stayed behind. If you can retrieve Love Song, who can disrupt the calamity, then I can reduce your punishment. Let out the Pale Horses! Long-Armed Demon disappeared, Berobōchō was killed, and Dullahan was taken away – they are the only ones who can fight against inhuman enemies at this stage."

As Joker said this, she suddenly refuted her own words.

No. Even the Pale Horses were still humans. It was not completely safe to rely on them. It was too dangerous – perhaps she will have to go herself.

"I will return soon myself as well. That's all."

As if she just hung up a phone call, the conversation stopped together with the vibrations of the few bells. However, at the same time, all her bells began to vibrate even faster than before, sending out soundwaves as if she was a submarine searching for her enemy.

"'Love Song' was taken away – " Joker's face fell and she mumbled to herself, ignoring the maddening ringing of the bells. "Who was it, and where did they come from? Damn it. Single Room also disappeared, and they didn't even attempt to hide it – things always go wrong, always making me upset…"

She was beginning to get into a bad mood, and anxiety seeped into her voice. The more she spoke, the more her anger boiled, until it ruptured forth in a torrent.

"Who was it!? Who took Love Song… Was it Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
? Was it Sterilization Disinfection? – Or was it Single Room, who escaped from this place? Breaksun – no, she was the only one different from the lot. She would not do something like this."

Joker pronounced the name of that single innocent singer. Joker had placed all her precious trust in her voice. She shook her head.

“No matter what, it doesn’t matter if I don’t know who it was – no one can escape from me, from Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, from the omniscient sensory organ!”

She suddenly hugged herself and knelt down, repeating over and over.

“She’s mine. Love Song is mine!”

As if praying to God, Joker solemnly repeated those words over and over, and once again looked toward that place where time had stopped.

A long time ago, the Greater Fragment named Single Room was sealed by three separate powers, and isolated in that space in the depths of the forest.

However, the Greater Fragment residing within Breaksun’s body broke through the isolation using Poison
Catastrophe
’s power to twist cause and effect, and restored the place to normal.

Even so, Joker still liked this place.

Not having anything to do with anybody, far away from every danger, growing old silently in this place – how happy that would be.

However –

She could not do that. She could only search for that place with a longing look in her eyes as if she was a foolish child.

How empty everything was.

“Ah! So terrifying, so terrifying!”

Joker screamed hoarsely, agonizingly. “Why am I the sensory organ? I don’t feel, I don’t want to feel! I don’t want to feel! I don’t want to see – I don’t want to feel anything. So scary, so scary. So scary – the subterranean rivers and magma are scary, the endless darkness of the universe is scary. Wishes, words, actions from

innumerable humans, all mixed up – it was more terrifying than madness! … Ah, I can't handle this anymore. It's so scary!"

She shook her head as if wanting to shake something away, then yelled at the sky.

"Where can I be at peace? Where is Heaven? Where is silence?"

She then lowered her head and took a deep breath.

"Where is – God?"

This question had always haunted her.

Because no one ever replied.

Joker, in her infinite loneliness, adjusted her sunglasses and kept walking into the depths of the forest.

"Moon –" She called out the name of that girl who was with her in the depths of the alley. "Did you become the happiest person in the world, just like how you dreamt?"

Jingle jingle jingle… the bells kept ringing.

"It seems that I – still can't live a quiet life."

Crybaby Joker murmured as drops of tears fell from her eyes.

Symphony 4: The Adventures of Vegetable Juice and Tomato Juice

“Hehe!”

The man with wolf-like eyes laughed in a way quite incongruous to his looks. Indeed, he roared with laughter as he clapped his hands, though he wasn’t congratulating anything – or anyone.

He only laughed and clapped because he couldn’t hold it back.

“It’s starting.”

He mumbled this, then roared with laughter once again.

“Aha, ahahaha, ahahahahaha! What is this? I’m way too lucky, aren’t I? It doesn’t matter how good a buddy God is to me, isn’t this so smooth that it’s almost frightening?”

He was an extraordinary man.

Startlingly tall, but not sinewy at all. His long black hair, which was painstakingly taken care of, moved in the breeze as he looked around, surveying his surroundings.

This man named Zekiguchi Noshinari sniggered, shoulders shaking with merriment.

“Where is everyone else?”

He stood atop a tall chimney of an abandoned factory that no longer spewed out smoke. This vantage point was like a sentry tower, from which he could see the entirety of the seashore and the industrial district. What’s more, he could see how the town itself was laid out, though of course, it was only due to his eyesight, which rivalled that of a telescope, that he could see such minute details.

But everything, buildings and crowds alike, melted into the darkness with the coming of night.

In the sky above, the moon and the stars sparkled, mirroring the endless lights on Earth, but the place Zekiguchi was at was gradually drowning in an infernal blackness.

“Crybaby – she still hasn’t made a move? She is being cowardly as always. Doesn’t she know that, while she’s muttering ‘so scary so scary’ and hiding herself, the world is gradually getting destroyed?” But Zekiguchi stopped in the middle of mocking a certain someone and turned his sight, which could see in the dark as well as functioning as a telescope, to a certain direction.

“Oh?”

Armored trucks were swarming through the town below, shattering the peace of the evening as they slaughtered everyone in their way and pushed relentlessly forward.

“Ohoho, not bad. The Pale Horses… does she want to destroy this ordinary town in the flames of war? Melodia Noise
Tear Song
is really putting everything into this – of course, ‘Love Song’ is her lifeline.”

Zekiguchi Nashinori muttered to himself and occasionally smacked his lips.

“Tch, why am I mumbling to myself? What a strange habit.”

The girl who used to stay next to Zekiguchi would always become excited and smile whenever he said anything. Staying next to him became her ordinary reality, and she loved to go everywhere with him.

“Ume-chan –”

He pronounced that name, then shook his head, as his usual cold smile, which dripped with disdain for the entire world, emerged on his face.

“… I’m fine with just being by myself.”

Zekiguchi Nashinori opened his arms and declared to the darkness of the night.

“Come, my servants! The final battle is about to begin!”

His low snigger echoed above the city.

She kept running, running, running, running on as if she had endless stamina. However, though she had a head of green hair like vegetable juice and was an immortal, she soon felt tired and began to say things like “Let’s rest a bit” “Please, I’m dying”.

Breaksun was almost crying and talked as if she was about to die.

“Wh, wha, what’s wrong… Why are we running like this, Kajiri? Ack, ack! Can’t… has it got to do with being high-spirited? The spirit to keep going? The spirit to run till we reach the end of the horizon – Ack!”

“That has nothing to do with running. Besides, I’m older than you, Breako.”

The red haired boy – the Greater Fragment given the strange name of Nikuyama Kajiri – sighed when he saw how she was almost collapsing.

“Hey, hey hey, feelings of being tired are meaningless. Why do you still have that kind of sensation? Do you even know what our situation is right now? Why are you still so slow?”

“… Situation? Um – Ah!”

Breaksun suddenly lifted her head and looked around her. Her face began to turn pale and she started to shiver as she rested her chin in her hands, looking completely different from her usual demeanor.

Kajiri frowned and asked: “What’s wrong?”

“Where are we?!” She yelled with a fully serious face.

“…Huh?” How did she suddenly get so confused? Kajiri wondered if she… if she… could it be…

Breaksun grabbed Kajiri’s shoulders and shook him all over.

“Where are we? Who am I? Am I Breaksun? No, Kajiri, I was working! Why?! Why did it end up like this?! I was brought here by force! Did I have to call off my job?!”

“… You still haven’t figured out what’s going on?!”

Kajiri looked around in alarm, completely contrary to his usual idiotic expression. He was afraid their argument might be noticed,

making the situation worse for them.

They were currently being chased, after all.

However, Breaksun's 'innate ability to conceal oneself' twisted her cause and effect, and this even included Kajiri, which meant no one noticed them at all.

Kajiri shook Breaksun forcibly and took in a deep breath, then began to explain the situation to her.

"Listen, Sterilization Disinfection and Unpleasant Counter-Current – basically, my kindred Fragments – are chasing us in order to use our abilities. I just fought them, but that was a very rough fight and we still don't know their full capacities. Those two excel in fighting. For them, fighting us is as easy as playing on a Pachinko machine. That's why we need to run away quickly. Do you understand?"

"Ok!" Breaksun raised her arms and said happily. Nothing was ok, Kajiri thought to himself.

He had lived with Breaksun for a while now, yet he still did not understand the way she thought – or rather, Kajiri had no idea what was going on in her head.

Breaksun tilted her head and crossed her arms, then began to smile.

"Basically, we have some trouble on our hands, so we need to run away, right? Ok, Ok, no problem. That job was a bit dangerous anyways. I didn't plan to work there for too long anyways."

According to Breaksun, a woman called Joker spotted her when Breaksun was singing on the roadside during the day. Joker invited her to go to this building every night as a singer to perform. Kajiri couldn't understand why Breaksun could only be noticed by others when she was singing.

"Joker-san just greeted me, and said things like 'you've been working hard'…"

Kajiri put his hands on her shoulder and narrowed his eyes towards Breaksun, who was mumbling. "Joker? What a strange name. Was it a fake name?"

"Isn't Nikuyama Kajiri a worse name?"

“Didn’t you give me that name?”

As they talked about trivial things like this, Breaksun suddenly had a strange expression on her face, as if she suddenly felt something. Following her gaze, Kajiri looked towards his right.

“Damn –” Kajiri made a low cry and grabbed Breaksun’s hand. The two of them began to gallop along the busy street in front of the station. He looked past rows of fast food outlets and karaoke bars, and dived into one – a karaoke bar that looked rather worse for wear. He pressed Breaksun against the wall near the entrance and whispered: “… Be quiet, Breako. Just pray like this.”

“… I’m not called Breako. Huh? Ah – Fine.”

Breaksun deliberately covered her mouth and closed her eyes, and started to genuinely pray.

Kajiri held his breath and grabbed the crucifix dangling from his neck.

Some nonsense modern music was being played in the shop. The shopkeeper looked very leisurely where he stood, yawning behind the counter.

There was nothing significant there. The clock on the wall was already pointing at midnight. Another day had passed by.

“…”

As he tried to suppress his breathing, a riot broke out in front of the shop. All the passer-bys were looking at something in surprise.

Of course – Kajiri thought this as he hid near the entrance of the shop and showed just half of his face, looking out intently.

Those people in long dresses were talking further down the road as if they were the only people there.

Sterilization Disinfection, Unpleasant Counter-Current, and that girl calling herself Gankyū Eguriko had chased after them without even getting a change of clothes, and everyone was looking at them.

He tried to listen carefully and heard their voices.

“… They completely disappeared.”

“You’re the one who said they went this way. We should have turned right at the first intersection; that would be the right choice. But really – I can’t feel them at all…”

“Stop fighting~ Um, Um, should we all split up to find them rather than staying together?”

“No. We still don’t know everything about their battle abilities. It’s dangerous to split ourselves up…”

Damn it. They were completely fixated on finding Breaksun and Kajiri. However, they did not sense Kajiri and Breaksun at all, and walked past them with the crowds.

“Phew…”

Kajiri finally let go of Breaksun’s hand, which he had kept in his grasp, once the figures of the three women disappeared around the corner.

This ability was truly very convenient when escaping, though not very useful when trying to follow other people. Poison Catastrophe’s corrosion of cause and effect – the ability to completely erase the relationship between herself and everyone else.

“Kajiri?”

Breaksun looked surprised as she reached out for Kajiri. She put her hand on his chest, and immediately leaned her head against it too.

“Kajiri, did you just grow some breasts?”

“…Huh?”

What was this idiot talking about at such a tense moment? Kajiri thought as he put his hand on top of his shirt. His chest had indeed gotten bigger despite him being a boy. But how could this be? This was not some boring television show where Kajiri actually turned out to be a female character!

Kajiri took out the thing he was hiding under his shirt.

“… An apple?”

Breaksun tried to bite into it.

“Mmm.”

Kajiri briefly thought that owners must take after their dogs.

Breaksun looked up and took the apple away from her mouth.

“Urk. It’s metallic.”

“It’s not for you to eat. You should know that just by looking. It’s probably made of pure gold. You said that you’re poor, so I thought… it’d probably get you lots of money if you sold it.”

Kajiri puffed up his chest proudly, but Breaksun smiled rather confusedly.

“Stealing is a crime, Kajiri… But thank you.”

Breaksun lowered her head and looked seriously at the apple.

“But this is such a pretty apple. Why would it be underneath the floor board? Why is it hidden there?”

“How would I know? It’s probably someone’s secret stash. Rich people back in the days used to hide their treasure, and many would die before they managed to even utilize those treasures. How stupid.”

Breaksun laughed heartily at this. Kajiri then suggested: “Should we rest a bit, Breaksun? Those guys are still circling the area. It’s better to hide using your power than to carelessly walk around.”

“It would be good to rest. I haven’t walked this much for so long, I can barely move anymore.”

She wobbled towards the counter as she said this. She smiled at the sleepy receptionist and wrote down her name in the register.

By writing down their name, they could have ended up leaving a trace for other people to follow –

“Please give us a room.”

The employee didn’t answer, as if he didn’t notice Breaksun. He even mumbled sleepily ‘there are no customers here’. He was not deliberately ignoring Breaksun; it was only that he did not notice her. It was the disconnection between cause and effect due to her corrosive power, the curse of being unable to connect with anyone

– that was why Breaksun had all sorts of obstacles in daily life. She couldn't pay when she bought things at the market, and the cashier won't give her the goods back even after she paid.

"Ah! He can't detect me after all."

There was a trace of loneliness underneath her smile. She dutifully took out her wallet and paid.

What cancelled the effect of her corrosion of cause and effect? Was it the Lesser Fragment known to her as the Apple, or just the owners of Greater Fragments? Did those things repel and work against the property of her Fragment, which twists causes and effect? Kajiri pondered this. Or perhaps he was wrong, and she simply forgot things quicker?

She had always been alone. She would never be remembered – Breaksun caught Kajiri's hand and smiled tenderly at him.

"Alright, let's sing. Kajiri, Kajiri, come here. Let me drown you in my wondrous voice, hehe! I haven't sung karaoke for so long!"

"… I don't understand you at all!" Kajiri grabbed hold of her hand despite his muttering.

Why would her ability to corrode cause and effect only disappear when she was singing?

Breaksun pouted without even finishing one song. For some reason, someone tipped orange juice on their deep-fried snack. Breaksun was reminded of how she was ignored by the attendant, and mumbled unhappily.

"People are certainly incapable of living alone. There are definitely people out there who think its fine to live on their own, but that's a disease."

"…a disease?"

"You'd get lonely."

Clank, clank. Kajiri bit the microphone. Breaksun stopped him gently and sat down on the cheap chair next to him, and murmured while swinging her legs: "It's not a virus. Loneliness can cause diseases on its own."

“…”

“But it can be cured by having people beside you.”

Breaksun looked at Kajiri tenderly. Her green hair seemed to melt in the soft light. She gently patted him, as if she was caressing a puppy.

“… Kajiri cured me.”

“Mmm.” Kajiri whined in a low voice and twisted around, and a light blush was creeping up his cheeks. “That’s enough. Stop touching me. You’re hot!”

“Don’t be shy! Come on. Ahh – it’s comfy to feel someone else’s body temperature.”

“Pervert!”

“Pervert?! Why? This is normal interaction between humans.”

She inherited Poison Catastrophe ’s power from her father, the corrosion of cause and effect, this ability that removed all her connections with other people as if it was a curse. Breaksun hadn’t had body contact with other people for over ten years. Now she was feeling attached to other humans, and craved the warmth of someone else.

When he left her, her father said this –

Find Single Room in the depth of the forest if it gets unbearable.

Her father was perhaps concerned and worried about his daughter, who could not control her power.

Therefore, he told her that Single Room should be able to remove Poison Catastrophe ’s power.

But Breaksun felt it didn’t matter whether her power was removed.

On the one hand, it was very convenient to live with this power. On the other hand, she was very satisfied as long as Kajiri stayed next to her. She never thought about removing this lack of freedom, nor did she wish Kajiri to suffer because of her wish.

“Because Kajiri…”

They had deep-fried snakes and there were oil stains on their mouths. Kajiri kept picking up tissue and wiped Breaksun’s mouth.

How convenient.

“You’ve always stayed in that forest on your own, right? You didn’t have a single companion, just like me. You were very very lonely, and passed all your days on your own, right? Did you ever wonder – how good it must be to stop being lonely? How good would it be if only humans can live while being alone?”

“Mmm…”

But Kajiri didn’t answer either yes or no.

Don’t worry, Breaksun’s gentle look seemed to say to the boy who was even shorter than her.

“If humans never experienced loneliness, then we wouldn’t feel happy to meet other people, right? We wouldn’t feel the joy of spending time with others, and we wouldn’t feel the contentment of making good friends. Sometimes, I think it’s better if humans don’t seek perfection.”

“What kind of nonsense are you talking about?” Kajiri looked rather upset and sat cross-legged on the chair.

He looked savage, and yet quite cute. Breaksun smiled when she saw the sharp canine teeth peeking out of his mouth.

“Just try to think of this as a human. There are many people who kept crying that they were lonely, that they were confused, and they died without any sense of satisfaction. That was very sad!”

“So their lives were boring?”

“I don’t like this about Kajiri at all… it’s not cute at all. Why are you looking so spiteful? I do have to think about humans once in a while. I’m a poet!”

Breaksun got rather emotional all of a sudden and held up an unusual song list in her hand, and said in a low voice: “But it’s unnecessary for Kajiri to discard your life to get rid of people’s loneliness. We want to love others because of our loneliness. I like

humans who need such attachments.”

“Hmm?”

Kajiri didn’t seem to be listening to her. Breaksun suddenly start to sing a mysterious song: “Have nothing～ Have nothing～ Have nothing～.”

“But it’s very unhappy to not sing in a karaoke. I come here rarely enough as it is already.”

“You meant ‘tragic’, right?”

“Ah, that’s right, tragic, not unhappy. Japanese is such a difficult language!”

“Which language have you been speaking all this time?”

“Erk, you’re not cute at all, Kajiri. How come you know more than me even though you’ve been locked up for hundreds of years?!”

“I learnt the necessary knowledge from the Mushi.”

Kajiri said those incomprehensible words and muttered to himself in a daze.

“So why do you not feel tense at all, Breako? We’re currently being chased! Those guys will kill Breako until not even a finger of yours is left in this world. Why are you still in a mood to sing in this situation? Could you start thinking with your brain?!”

“Don’t call me Breako. And my brain is very energized right now.”

Breako waved her hands above her head enthusiastically and made strange hand gestures while smiling.

“Alright alright. Kajiri already lived for centuries, right? You don’t have a lot of memories, do you? Are you feeling relaxed, because you feel it won’t matter anymore even if you’re killed?”

“How can I possibly give up that quickly? I have lots of things left to do. I need to kill those who locked me up in the forest
- Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, Poison

Catastrophe
. I need to kill them all."

"Revenge? What an empty wish. By the way, I am Poison
Catastrophe
. Are you going to kill me too?" Breaksun crossed her hands above her head, making enigmatic gestures in such a tense moment.

At the sight of that, Kajiri slumped down and looked hopelessly at her, who was still smiling.

"There are more fun things than that, Kajiri. Things like reading a manga or watching movies; those are very fun. Didn't Christ also preach to love your enemies?"

Christ did say that when he was being hotly pursued by his mortal enemy, the Devil.

But that had nothing to do with the current situation. His revenge would be pointless, and wouldn't it be such a waste to spend his important and precious life on such a tiresome and painful affair? That was what Breaksun thought about Kajiri.

Breaksun hugged Kajiri, who was pouting, in her arms. She gave him a relaxed smile.

"Yep, we escaped from those guys who are chasing us. So let's go see a movie right now, ok? That's definitely better than revenge. Let's go do something fun. I heard that movie is a new work made by a famous director after four years, and it's very popular in America."

Faced with Kajiri, who was completely disinterested in these things, Breaksun started to bring up one irrelevant topic after another. If they didn't know when their life would end, then they should just spend it little by little in happiness. That was Breaksun's belief.

She was really feeling superbly happy right now. There were no ulterior motives between them, and they were only conversing in an ordinary manner. This was a precious moment that Breaksun has almost never had in her life up until now.

Breaksun Henselmine had seventy-seven younger sisters, sixty-six younger brothers, but no elder brothers or sisters. There were fifty-five women she called 'mother', but only one father. She did not have a single friend, and of course never had a lover. However, she

had recently had someone who stayed beside her.

“_”

Kajiri suddenly lifted his head, and looked around rapidly. That alarmed gesture, like that of a feral animal, made Breaksun’s smile disappear and she looked concerned.

“Kajiri…”

“I hear a strange sound.”

He stood up quickly and spoke in a low voice.

“What is this - is this an earthquake? What’s this, is this… wailing?”

In the blink of an eye, the ordinary karaoke room suffered an unprecedented shelling.

That’s right, shelling.

The cheap walls were blasted apart, and debris flew everywhere. The ceiling made a huge sound and the lights on the ceiling came crashing down. As if they were in a capsized boat, everything in the room suddenly was flipped upside down, and bowls and furniture miraculously started to fly in the air.

“—!”

Debris flew everywhere. There were pieces of the building all about them.

More danger ahead - his instincts reacted faster than the warning.

Bam!

A second bomb flew towards them, together with the shocking sound of its launch and the impact waves that shook the entire world.

“Ahhhh—!”

Breaksun screamed in horror. What was happening? Just what was going on?

The initial attack had already all but destroyed the building the karaoke bar was in. Dust clouds were all she could see. She could

sense nothing else. Her entire body was enveloped by terror.

Someone pulled her up with an enormous strength.

“Breaksun! Don’t open your eyes. Close your mouth. Relax your body. Trust me!”

“Ah — Ah, O, OK—!”

Breaksun relaxed upon Kajiri’s urging, and allowed her body to go limp as if she was dead. She could not see anything. All she knew was that some bad guys were firing towards them. The chaos was terrifying. She could not even move her fingers, and could only move according to Kajiri’s instructions.

She trusted Kajiri –

Bam!

“_”

Another bomb flew by right in front of them, stirring up a roaring wind in the spreading dust storm and tussled their hair. The searing wave of heat immediately followed.

“Erk—”

This wouldn’t do.

Their aim was getting more and more accurate.

Do they already know where we are?

No.

This is very dangerous. We are going to be killed.

Although Breaksun jokingly said those relaxing words to calm Kajiri down, she didn’t want to die either.

She didn’t want to die in such a ridiculous circumstance, didn’t want to be killed by people she didn’t even know about.

She had never had any relationships with others since she was a child.

She had finally found someone she could talk with, who understood

her. Although he did have a sharp tongue, his heart was very gentle. He was a good housemate, and a good friend.

She didn't want to die.

"Uwah!"

It could have been a hundredth of a second or a thousandth of a second. She didn't know which, but Breaksun felt the aura of that approaching bomb in that split second. The bomb that flew towards them kept approaching and changed its path in the dust. It was going to completely destroy Kajiri and her existences.

She understood these things without thinking.

"Ah –"

Breaksun's body instinctively triggered a defensive reaction.

"Aaaaahhhhh! No!"

At that time –

The Greater Fragment named Poison
Catastrophe
rejected the cause and effect of the approaching bomb.

Humans are not machines manufactured from factories. Therefore, every individual is different, with each having their own body and their unique ways of thinking.

This was an indispensable and absolutely necessary destiny. In order to maintain a diverse group of individuals and their genetic materials, humans reproduced and created different offspring by combining genetic materials from two unique organism into a new whole.

This created ordinary children, ingenious children, and also children of an inferior quality, though the common, streamlined mode of education usually produce people within the range of normalcy.

However, there are always exceptions, with a number of children growing up knowing they are abnormalities.

Statistically, one percent of humans think in ways completely different from others of their species.

Seven percent within that group do not regard killing other humans as taboo.

They are not afraid of blood. They cannot imagine pain experienced by other people, nor can they comprehend the idea of death.

They are abnormal killers, who became so either due to their genes or their upbringing.

They will not feel confusion, nor will they need a command to kill.

“The path of the third shot curved unnaturally.”

These people would usually be oblivious to their mental differences and lead ordinary lives like other normal humans – at least in places like Japan, which did not have an army.

In the countries that did, they joined the armed forces during times of war, and would realize the abnormalities of their mentality in the maddening slaughter of a battlefield.

“According to data point 003, this kind of abnormality necessitates a quicker pace of attack.”

In these places, they were treasured as outstanding warriors on the battlefield. After the war, however, they would become very confused after knowing the fact that they did not fear killing other humans. As they were incapable of going back to living as ordinary humans, they would usually volunteer to join the army again when the next war arose, joining the vanguard to fight in the frontlines, over and over until their eventual deaths.

This army was a collection of such people.

Called the Pale Horses, they were the private army of the Sakaki Organization, the largest conglomerate on Earth.

According to the Bible, this is the name of the devil that brought the Apocalypse upon the world. As such, the people crowned with this title were an army of killers that could not live outside of the

battlefield –

“Continue the shelling until we can confirm the target’s death. We have permission from the Sakaki Organization. We have an infinite supply of bombs and weapons, and we will not be charged no matter how many civilians die in the process.”

There was no joy, no happiness, no fear, and no guilt associated with such slaughter.

After all, causing death and devastation was as ordinary as throwing away garbage for these people, so why should they have any feelings towards it? As a group, the Pale Horses knew only how to kill.

Guriko had lived for a long time, and she had seen many incomprehensible things.

There had been unpleasant monsters, the Mushi, and Greater Fragments with miraculous abilities. Those could be deemed as supernatural with a single glance. However, what she saw right now was incomparably more surprising, even bordering on ridiculous.

Tanks appeared on the busy street.

“Huh –?”

Tanks roared through the town on this ordinary night, silhouetted by the lights in the shops.

There were tanks, actual tanks.

She couldn’t see anything else.

Crude turrets and machine guns protruded from the heavily armored navy body of the armored vehicle.

A man with a military air was standing on top of the protruding control tower and had a radio in his hand, seemingly giving out all sorts of commands.

The treads of the tank kept rolling forward, making creaking sounds as it drove along the road among dense crowds of people.

Bam. A thick and dull sound of bombs being let off came from inside the tank, and a wave of destruction was released with it.

"…"

Guriko was hiding in the shadow of buildings a little away from the tanks. She frowned as she heard the sound of the bombing and looked towards Mitsuki and Mina standing beside her, who were similarly shocked.

"What is this about?"

"How am I supposed to know?

"Ah! What's this? Is this for real? Why are there tanks?!"

Guriko and the others had been running along the night streets in pursuit of Poison
Catastrophe
and Single Room.

However, their long and elegant dresses stood out way too much. After realizing this, they bought a change of clothing in the shops along the road – that basically summed up what they did.

When they left the shops due to the deafening sound outside, they saw actual tanks rolling down the streets in the middle of the town.

One, two, three – there were ten tanks in total.

"No matter how you look at this… This is pretty awful."

Mina took out her spray cans again seemingly from nowhere. With the power of the Sterilization Disinfection Greater Fragment, she channeled the power of Sterilization Disinfection gradually through the nozzle of this tool.

"Single Room and Poison
Catastrophe
already escaped, and now we have this riot – this doesn't seem to be completely unrelated. Seriously, tanks? Aren't those things only seen on TV these days? Aren't they very powerful? They are usually shown to be crushed by monsters, but they are so big in reality –

they can at least crush me.”

Though she said this, she kept walking sedately towards the crowd of tanks. Mitsuki hurriedly waved towards Mina.

“Shh～ Sis, sister, what are you doing? Don’t go over there. It’s dangerous～”

It wasn’t daytime, so there were not many pedestrians around.

There was no one who dared to casually face a tank like this.

People were either running for their lives or screaming pitifully from their wounds. The streets were enveloped in a feeling of terror.

But the horrifying tanks were not stopping because they faced civilians. No, they opened fire on everything that was in their way, then callously ran over the wounded and the dead. It was veritably a scene from hell. The houses along the street roared with flames, painting the night sky a bloody red.

“According to God Mushi Emperor…” As Unpleasant Counter-Current, who shouldered people’s negative emotions, horrors, and screams, Mitsuki showed a scared expression on her face and whispered to Mina. “Poison
Catastrophe
’s ability is to twist and corrode cause and effect. I remember that now. But I can’t imagine what kind of ability that would be…”

Guriko, who was as confused as Mitsuki, also turned to speak to Mina: “Maybe she just twisted the laws of this world?”

Guriko pointed toward a direction, where a bomb flying through the sky suddenly turned and changed its direction, creating a curve like a ball thrown by a skilled baseball pitcher.

It exploded harmlessly out of the way, destroying itself.

The tanks did not stop firing, but they could not breach the area where cause and effect were twisted, as if it was protected by a bounded field, isolated from all the laws of the world. Destruction cannot reach within it.

“This so-called ‘cause and effect’ is really just the relationship between one thing and another, right?”

Bombs flew everywhere. Mina, who detested the smell of gunpowder, covered her nose with her hand, then said in a calm and low voice: “If cause and effect applies to the destruction caused by the bombs – or rather, cutting up the relationship between the bomb and everything around it – if this counts as twisting cause and effect, then the bombs will never hit their intended destination. What a powerful ability.”

She sighed.

“Poison
Catastrophe
is right over there. Firstly, we’ll get rid of these rude tanks for them and do them a favor with this opportunity. Then we will negotiate with Single Room. Got it?”

Holding the spray cans that could either annihilate everything with Genocide Justice
Annihilation Mist
, or fix everything in place with Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
, Mina made a small smile.

“Well, which one is more powerful? Tanks or a monster? Hmm – no matter what, ordinary humans shouldn’t be able to defeat one of the seven split roles of God, right?”

Mina leapt forward and galloped into the battlefield with Guriko and Mitsuki, where the maddening flames of chaos already enveloped everything. They would help Poison
Catastrophe
, negotiate with Single Room, and return Rinne to her original state –

“… Ahh.” Guriko eagerly anticipated returning to the battlefield and reverting to a demon. Her head shivered as she returned to how she was before, the time when she lived as a cruel monster. Guriko took out her weapon – her spoon – and grasped it tightly in her hand.

The bomb was repelled, but where they were remained the same.

The bombardment paused for a while – Kajiri pushed aside the debris that had piled up on top of him and spat out dust carelessly.

“Cough – spit, spit. Damn it. This is such a mess!”

Breaksun was also buried by the piles of debris that resulted from the ceiling caving in. While continuing to curse, Kajiri helped her to climb out. Although the bombs were repelled away due to the twisted cause and effect, they still couldn’t avoid the broken concrete and building materials that flew everywhere.

“Woah! Ahh – I can’t hear anything.”

Breaksun moved her eyes all around as she put her finger into her ears. The surroundings were pitch black from the gunpowder and fire, and they could not see anything, as if they were isolated from the world. Yet they still could not relax. “My eardrums feel funny from the sound of the shelling…”

The both of them looked very untidy, but at least they remained uninjured.

It was veritably a miracle to stay like this when tanks were aiming at them personally and continuously fired at them.

A miracle.

Yes – a miracle.

Twisting the cause and effect of the world – that is Poison Catastrophe
’s power, one seventh of God’s strength. As if she had no relationship to the bombs, she remained uninjured from a bombardment of that degree.

Breaksun still could not control this power. Therefore, her previous defensive reaction had activated quite unconsciously, a result of her survival instinct.

Kajiri didn’t know if she would be able to repel such a ferocious attack next time.

His ability was not designed for combat. They had no choice. They could only run.

“Ka, Kajiri, where are you – Kajiri?”

Breaksun seemed afraid in the dust cloud. Her hands were shaking. She had her back to Kajiri, but she did not turn around. Could it be she temporarily went blind due to blood loss?

"… Mmm? I'm not going anywhere without you."

He took her hand and firmly pulled her onto his back to carry her.

Although Kajiri still looked like a child, he was an immortal with an enormous Fragment inside him.

He used the power of the Fragment and increased his own upper body strength, then he easily carried her on his back despite the difference in their heights.

"Are you okay, Breako?"

He thought she would say something like 'I'm not called Breako!' as per usual, but she only shivered and did not reply. Maybe her hearing still hadn't recovered. Anyone would feel terrified when they were suddenly faced with a shelling, not to mention that her personality was very ill-attuned to violence.

She did not have a relationship with anyone and just lived in an ordinary and simple way. The only wishes she had, she fulfilled through singing. She was a girl who lived in loneliness.

If fate dictated that such a girl must stand upon this cruel battlefield, then Kajiri detested this fate. If Single Room was the one who caused this situation, then Kajiri would even hate himself as well.

"…Damn it!"

Kajiri swore viciously. At that moment, Breaksun put her head on his shoulder and closed her eyes, her arms tightly enveloping him. Kajiri looked at her. She must be feeling very anxious, but it would be difficult for him to walk while being hugged like this.

After a brief moment of thought, he reached for the crucifix hanging off his neck, and his finger was instantly wounded by the sharp decoration.

Drops of red blood seeped out of his skin.

That blood glowed like fireflies, and wriggled as if it was alive.

Together with the sound of his wobbling, Kajiri touched Breaksun's forehead.

Then, as if she was startled – she blinked.

To confirm that she was alright, Kajiri pretended to be nonchalant as he asked: "Are you ok, Breako?"

"… I'm not called Breako!"

She tilted her head.

"Huh? I – My ears can hear again, and my eyes can see."

"That's good to hear. Seriously, you are an immortal. You should be able to heal yourself from those kinds of wounds."

As he complained, Kajiri carried Breaksun, hopping along on top of the pile of debris.

He still could not see much, but that should apply for the enemy as well. They must leave very soon, otherwise –

Kajiri was feeling very anxious, while Breaksun was still rather confused. She asked: "Ka, Kajiri – that, back then, what was that? Bam – it just exploded. Do I, do I also have some strange abilities?"

"Eh, I don't know. Anyways, let's run away first."

"Oh, oh, OK… I won't bother Kajiri. I won't talk."

It would be a great help if she understood the situation. They didn't have the time to talk in such a leisurely manner – they needed to ascertain the current situation. For all he knew, they could be shot at any time. Just as he thought this, he heard a chirping sound, as if a bird was calling out.

"– Oh?!"

No. It was the sound of gunfire. The sparks of bullets being fired could be seen through the smoke. Just then, a bullet whizzed by next to Kajiri, together with the sound of something being broken as if it hit something.

"… It's guns this time? We're being targeted again. Damn it. Aren't they satisfied with bombs yet – it seems they really want to kill us. Well, come at us directly then!"

“Huh? Huh – what? What’s going on?” Breaksun looked very awful, but Kajiri had no time for her. He didn’t even know who his enemy was anymore. It seemed to be someone apart from Sterilization Disinfection –

Bam.

This time, the bullet seemed to have almost grazed his ear.

Despite not being able to see anything, the opponent’s fire was extraordinarily accurate. They were probably facing an experienced army. Meanwhile, here they were, a boy who was not proficient at fighting, carrying someone who couldn’t even freely use her own powers.

The odds were quite against them. The imbalance in power was too great between them, and he didn’t even know if they could manage to escape.

As he thought this, a bullet grazed Kajiri’s feet, bringing blood to the skin over his ankles. He stumbled and fell, and cold sweat seeped out of his forehead as he moaned in pain.

“Damn it. It has only been a few hundred years, and human weapons have already developed to such a stage – hey, Breako, hold on to me! You don’t have regenerative powers. If you get hit by even one bullet, you’ll be off to meet the Maker.”

Bullets flew towards them like rain drops as he yelled. Kajiri kept running at the risk of his life until he finally escaped from the smoky battleground. His field of view suddenly widened.

“_“

The city had already been reduced to a battlefield.

The flames shone with a maddening light and tore through the darkness, dying the entire world a shade of red. Smoke and sparks flew everywhere, and crackling sounds could be heard continuously from the burning ruins.

Buildings had collapsed into piles of rubble. Shops burned, roared with flames. There were corpses lying on the ground, and the few survivors ran around in a panic everywhere.

Kajiri stood, shell-shocked at this scene of utter despair.

Suddenly –

He felt a killing aura approaching them, but he responded too late.

“Urk!”

With a bam, his right foot twitched as it if was hit by a bullet – no, he was hit. The attacks were coming from behind them – damn it, he was carrying Breaksun on his back. She was in danger.

Kajiri realized this and immediately turned around. They were standing in a wide open space with a clear field of view. Their enemy’s aim became more accurate, and began to fire together with a rapid speed.

“Damn it, what is this! They’re all firing from places I can’t see!”

Kajiri couldn’t help but roar in anger, but this only made the situation worse.

The firing did not stop, but became fiercer, the volume of fire heavier with each passing moment. The situation was getting worse and worse. Breaksun was being carried by Kajiri, and she had also just gotten out of her panicked state, therefore she could not feel a sense of crisis like before. Therefore, Poison Catastrophe ’s power – the alteration of cause and effect – could not be activated either.

What was worse was that they were in the most horrible situation imaginable. A group of soldiers, armed to the teeth, was walking out from the shadows on the other side. They took cover as soon as they realized Kajiri had found them.

Kajiri walked at the end of the shopping street, which had been reduced to rubble, as if it had just gone through a major earthquake.

He tried aimlessly to think of a solution.

But just thinking achieved nothing.

His opponent was a group of professional soldiers. No matter how many inhuman abilities Kajiri had, he was far from matching an army skilled in killing and trained in all sorts of weapons.

“Tch… we’re not even on the same level. The difference is too big! Breaksun, close your eyes –”

“Mmm – Mmm, yes, will I go crazy if I see?”

There were people seeking help as they lay dying in a sea of blood. There were people burnt to a crisp by the fire. There were people crushed to a pulp by the collapsing buildings. This was a fiery hell full of death, misery, and anguish of humans. It was truly repulsive.

“… Urk?”

Kajiri suddenly felt bile rising in his throat, and did his best to push it back down.

“Chirp – let Mitsuki-chan teach you a thing or two~”

A sound suddenly came from the distance.

Kajiri was slightly confused, as if he heard this sound somewhere before – beside that, how could such a leisurely voice exist in this destructive and miserable hell on earth?

Then something incredible happened.

“Take this. Malicious ability – Killing Blow: Dining Table Throwback is here~”

A tank was thrown up in the air.

A tank, which was at least ten tons in weight, started to roll in midair as if it was merely a toy tank.

This was like some fake joke, and Kajiri’s jaw dropped, unable to close his mouth for ages.

Then more and more incredible things happened.

“Do you want to eat this as well~ Do you want to eat this~? Hehehe hahaha. Look big sis, my super Killing Blow: Dining Table Throwback completely ignores physical laws~”

Three tanks spun through the air and smashed into each other, then bounced off, flying off far into the night sky.

It was like a series of magical moves. What was more incredible was that the person who lifted up tanks like chopsticks was a slender

little girl.

She had a hat with round ears on her head, and a curly tail decoration was attached to her butt. She wore rather childlike clothing, her hair was tied into braids, and the ears on her hat and her tail were both wobbling cutely.

She looked like the girl whom Kajiri released from eternal stasis. He had been looking for Breaksun one afternoon, who had left the house and disappeared from his radar due to her corruption of cause and effect. He accidentally ran into Unpleasant Counter-Current – one of the Greater Fragments.

He couldn't remember why they met. What he was sure of was that she had been completely frozen, just like how he was before – just like how he had been when he was isolated in that forest. Kajiri pitied her, and had thus removed her seals.

That girl was currently fighting against the tanks. She looked as if she was very happy, and she waved her hands everywhere.

With a bam, one of the tanks currently flying through the sky fired a shell towards the girl. Even though it was fired while the vehicle was spinning, the projectile flew true, speeding towards the girl with deadly accuracy.

But she showed no signs of wanting to run away either.

"Hehehe. Those things can't kill me~"

The girl gazed at the superheated shell that was plummeting towards her and lifted up her right hand, which until then had been hidden in her giant gloves.

"Hiya! Let's go~"

She caught the shell with her hand – and put it next to her belly.

A terrifying giant mouth with teeth suddenly appeared on the girl's abdomen, and the sharp sound of chewing could be heard as it swallowed the shell. Then, at the end –

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth – this is retribution~"

A shell fired from the abdomen of the girl. It landed squarely on the tank that was still flying through the air and ripped the armored

vehicle to pieces, creating a fiery red glare as it exploded.

Its attack been rebounded upon it.

As if she was very satisfied with this result, the girl puffed out her chest and laughed out loud. “Aren’t I awesome? I’ve practiced fighting many times~ Your hatred isn’t strong enough. I’ve absorbed the damage you did to the surroundings and returned them all to you as retribution! This is Unpleasant Counter-Current, who gets stronger the longer the battle goes on~~”

“… That’s enough, Ki-chan.”

At a distance from the girl, a woman was releasing white mist from spray cans that silently annihilated tanks into nothing. Sterilization Disinfection was mumbling with a tone that carried some spite: “Why are you tossing these tanks everywhere?”

“Oh? You don’t like it? I can’t just let hatred lay around like this. I need to make it into energy and use it up~ I tossed those tanks right up~~”

“Yes, they flew… but isn’t there something called gravity on this earth? Stuff that were tossed up all come down eventually.”

Faced with Sterilization Disinfection’s cold tone, the girl tilted her head with an incredulous squeak.

Roll roll roll.

“Huh – ?!” Faced with the weighty tank that was falling down towards her, the girl ran around in a panic as she tried to dodge. She didn’t even consider that the tanks she tossed vertically upwards would come down. She was still too young.

“… And here I thought you grew up a little. Ki-chan is really still a little kid.”

Sterilization Disinfection did not say this with any hint of mockery, but with a soft tone and a smile. At the same time, the other tanks were still firing furiously at her.

“Indeed –”

The smile on her face suddenly disappeared. Sterilization Disinfection’s pristine white hair swayed as she stretched out her

hand. Her fingers held two plain and undecorated spray cans.

“If this is all you’re capable of, then my silly Ki-chan would be able to sort you out all by herself.”

A sticky, languid white mist started to seep out from the spray can.

“Well, I’ll play with you for a bit – just you try to get away from it.”

In front of her, who was still mumbling, the shell touched by the white mist stopped incredibly in mid-air.

“Type B - Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
.”

Sterilization Disinfection jumped up lightly and stood on the shell that was frozen in air. As shells were continuously fired at her, she calmly used the mist to freeze them all.

“Oh, thanks, you even provided places for me to stand on.”

One leap after another, as if she was a rabbit, she jumped along the bridge made up of consecutive shells and slowly approached the crowd of tanks. Then – she took out a different spray can from before.

“Oh right – this is my reply to your presents. I will sterilize and disinfect you.”

With a whiff, the white mist that tore out of the spray can blew away the tanks’ existence.

Sterilization Disinfection, God’s Judgment, the Digestive Organ – she was the terrifying ability that had destroyed the world until only Noah’s Ark was left. She was more terrifying than Kajiri had imagined.

“– are you ok?” A sound suddenly came from behind him.

Kajiri’s heart almost jumped out of his chest. He immediately turned to check the situation. Breaksun was also startled.

“You are – Guriko!”

“…”

Guriko. She was the girl he met a while ago, who called herself Gankyū Eguriko. She was wearing an extremely cute outfit, and it was a very short and breezy one too. It looked like someone forced her to dress like this.

“You’ll be killed if you’re standing in such an obvious position, Single Room. At least go hide somewhere.”

Her voice was innocent and devoid of any emotions, yet it seemed to include a sense of tenderness and kindness he has never before experienced.

“Ah–“

Kajiri froze on the spot and didn’t know how to reply. He could only remain silent, feeling confused. Breaksun, who stood next to him, pointed at Guriko and asked:

“You, you, um – why are you here?”

“… Who are you?”

Guriko looked at Breaksun for the first time after she spoke. She looked shocked and stared at Breaksun, her eyes dark and bottomless like that of gun barrels. Breaksun sighed in defeat after she saw Guriko’s expression and mumbled sadly.

“Ah, you forgot me again. No matter who it is, everyone forgets me as soon as they got to know me. Kajiri, is that due to my corrosion of cause and effect?”

Guriko narrowed her eyes and looked her from head to toe, then she clapped her hands suddenly and nodded as if she just understood something.

“I got it. You’re that woman who sang at the party. Your dress is all dirty now; I thought you were someone else. Of course I can’t remember you if you’re like this. Oh? The party back then? You should have seen me in the party just then. It’s probably because you were under the spotlight and can’t see the face of the customers under the stage.”

Guriko suddenly frowned as she chatted with Breaksun. She knelt down and touched Kajiri’s right leg. “You’re wounded.”

“Oh? Ah, I got hit just then.” Kajiri replied.

Guriko casually dug out the bullets in his leg after asking him a few more questions.

Blood spurted from the wound and she got stained from head to toe. The army chasing them had also disappeared without him noticing it. Did she take care of them too?

“Then -”

Guriko, this girl covered with blood, looked straight at Kajiri. They were of the same height, and their eyes were about the same level too.

She had a rugged haircut, as if she cut it herself. The spoon in her hand was dripping with blood. Kajiri thought she looked like a broken doll.

“Firstly, I want to clear up our misunderstanding…” Guriko chose her words carefully and said slowly.

“We don’t want to be your enemies. That was an unfortunate accident back then. We just want to borrow your abilities, just that…” After saying this, Guriko showed an expression that indicated she had exhausted her words and couldn’t think of anything else to say, but Kajiri still didn’t answer.

Breaksun slipped down from Kajiri’s back and stood up, and tilted her head with confusion. Then, just like before, she walked to stand between Guriko and Kajiri as if she wanted to protect Kajiri.

“But – Guriko, Kajiri…”

“It’s fine, Breako. Hey, Ganko.”

Kajiri caught hold of Breaksun’s wrist and stopped her from waving her hand around. At the same time, Breaksun and Guriko yelled simultaneously: “I’m not called Breako!” “I’m not Ganko!”

Kajiri completely ignored the stray bullets that flew all around them. He caught the hand of both of them and turned around.

The situation didn’t seem to be fitting for a casual and slow conversation. Although Sterilization Disinfection and Unpleasant Counter Current gradually changed the situation to their favor due to their overwhelming powers, it was about time for backup to arrive for the tanks and the army units here.

“Anyways, I get it. It’s too dangerous here – let’s go hide somewhere first. I will hear you out. You will chase me even if I refuse, anyways. But make no mistake – I am not God, and I am not omnipotent.”

“Mmm. That’s fine. No matter how little hope there is, I can only rely on it now.”

Guriko lowered her head and muttered. Then, as if having made up her mind, she lifted up her head and said: “Please, Single Room, please save Rinne.”

Hehehe. There was a sound of someone laughing.

“_“

Bam. Bam. The battalion of tanks fired their shells simultaneously with an unprecedented savagery. As if it was the final moment before the light of a candle went out, pillars of fire erupted all around them, killing innumerable people.

Amidst the destruction, a man in black stood unperturbed on the battlefield.

The existence of the man in black was like a shadow in this red world full of the light of the fire. He narrowed his eyes malevolently and the ends of his mouth lifted up in a half smile. He was altogether very eye-catching. His eyes were like those of a wolf, and mirrored back the long fringe that he evidently cared for meticulously. His outer appearance looked like a priest, but he gave out an unnamed feeling that made people dislike him.

“Zekiguchi – Nashinori?!”

Guriko called out a name and held up the blood-stained spoon in her hand.

“Piss off! What are you doing! Who gave you permission to hinder me?” Guriko roared at the man named Zekiguchi, not hiding her anger at all. Kajiri looked as if he recalled some bad memories as he looked that way.

Sterilization Disinfection and Unpleasant Counter-Current had all but destroyed the tanks. Zekiguchi Nashinori, who stood unmoving, slowly smiled as if he put on a mask.

“He is…?” Kajiri grasped his crucifix-shaped knife tightly and kept up his guard. Because of that – he became negligent of what was happening behind him.

“What a pity. You’ve missed your mark.”

A sound suddenly came out very closely behind them – Guriko opened her eyes wide and turned around, while Kajiri turned in a panic.

“Huh…?”

But it was too late. Breaksun, who was unaware of anything, was already in Zekiguchi Nashinori’s arms.

Zekiguchi pointed after Guriko and sniggered.

“Ahh, I’ll have you know that he was not my twin, but created from my ability. I modified the body of someone who no longer cared about his life to look exactly the same as mine. That laugh was only my trap.”

“You bastard – !”

Guriko raised her hand and prepared to throw a spoon. But Zekiguchi lifted up Breaksun as his shield, and used her to hinder his opponent’s attacks while he leapt away to his escape.

He only left some incredulous words after him.

“Now Love Song belongs to me. Thank you very much. This is finally beginning.”

“Hold on! What are you going to do with Poison Catastrophe ?!”

Guriko yelled loudly. Kajiri, meanwhile, left her and started to chase. He stepped on the few power poles and buildings that remained standing, and chased after Zekiguchi Nashinori as if he was in flight.

“Kajiri!”

“Breaksun!”

Breaksun stretched out her hand and cried out pitifully. Kajiri

chased her anxiously, using everything he could think of.

But he couldn't catch them. Even though his foe carried someone in his arms, Kajiri still couldn't catch up to the man.

Judging from the movements of this man named Zekiguchi, it was very possible that he was the despicable Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
– his ability was to alter his own flesh to the maximum extent possible. He could thus obtain the fastest running speed possible in this world, and it would be impossible to catch up to him.

"Damn it –" Kajiri yelled in anger and kept trying. Zekiguchi looked at him, and smiled pleasantly.

"Oho, what a loyal puppy. But Single Room, it's best for you to give up. Even though you hold the ultimate power, you are not the strongest of us, or even undefeatable – or do you want to be isolated and locked up in the forest again?"

" _ "

Kajiri's heart ached when he heard this. Those malicious words suddenly froze him from head to toe – with Zekiguchi Nashinori taking this opportunity to accelerate, escaping away for good.

"Hehehehe!" His despicable laughter floated through the night sky over the battlefield.

Aizawa Ume died back then, and the Long-Armed Demon was born.

Her memories were so very distant.

"…"

It was a fuzzy memory of the past. It was Aizawa Ume's final memory, and the Long-Armed Demon's very first memory.

She was killed by a robber. She thought she would never live again. She would never live in the world as Ume again.

She always thought that Ume-chan was such a useless kid.

Her hands were not dexterous. Her memory was bad, and she wasn't good at sports either. She was never praised by teachers at school. Those whom she considered good friends eventually also stopped talking to her and regarded her as an idiot. No one had ever taught her that she had something important worth keeping. Even though her parents would comfort her at home and say that she was good as she was – Ume was still very uneasy. She was uneasy and terrified. She was useless, she had no good points that others could praise her about. A kid like this would be discarded by her parents and friends at the end and be returned to God.

That was what Ume-chan thought when she was attacked by the robber, saw her parents' heads pierced through, and her own arms chopped off with a cracking sound.

It was all because of her. She never managed to be strong in her life, so God sent her a punishment. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. There was actually someone who extended a hand to someone like her, gave her an ability, and guided her.

She became confident. Her ability to form relationships with people started to bud. She was no longer that failure, that useless Aizawa Ume, but Long-Armed Demon. Someone made her so.

Zekiguchi Nashinori.

But he always appeared so lonely. Although his face occasionally smiled, it hurt for her look at him like that.

Long-Armed Demon always acted according to his wishes. She wanted him to laugh wholeheartedly. She always tried her best, always gave everything she could to make him happy.

Others did not know what he was like when they looked upon him.

He spread misfortune and destruction over the world, perhaps just like the works of the Devil.

But he was Ume's true benefactor.

What was he seeking, and where did he want to go? What was his goal, and how was he planning his conspiracies? She understood none of that. Even so, Ume thought he looked very pitiable.

If no one else was looking forward to fulfil his wishes, then it was probably also meaningless to fulfil them.

The days passed peacefully even if Zekiguchi Nashinori weren't there.

Aizawa Ume was killed by the robber and became a being superior to humans – yet although she was already Long-Armed Demon, Ume still wished to live like how she did before.

She didn't try to return to Zekiguchi, and just lived an ordinary life with that person.

Ume's recent daily life involved helping Nageki Kurukiyo get ready for work in the morning and watching him have breakfast.

She passed her days through playing with Sakaki Guryū and Usagawa Rinne, who lived in the same apartment complex as her, or with the three of them watching television together.

She possessed the power of the Apple, which could twist cause and effect and create miracles. She could even go to school. Why did she not wish for that?

Ume actually disliked school. That was how she always felt.

Aizawa Ume was dead.

She was living as the Long-Armed Demon now.

Since she was the Long-Armed Demon – she no longer had a right to exist if she refused to act as Zekiguchi Nashinori's subordinate. She wanted to dream on until she died, and passed all her days within this dream.

She believed in this no matter what.

Ume lived as if she lost her soul after she killed her nemesis – the robber Berobōchō – within the Eternity Institute.

She had severed the relationship she had with Zekiguchi Nashinori, which had been the core of her life until them. She didn't know what to do.

After that, the thought of returning to Zekiguchi Nashinori became terrifying for her. At the end, Ume stayed with Nageki Kurukiyo, who took her home, and effectively lived off him.

Apart from being slightly perverted in terms of personality, and treating her like a dog, that detective was actually rather normal in

his daily life. He was kind and tender towards Long-Armed Demon, as if she was his child or his younger sister, and he had a very kind soul.

She enjoyed Nageki Kurukiyo's gentleness. The days passed by in such happiness and stability. And yet all this – was nothing more than an illusionary dream at the end.

There were all sorts of news going through the town on the night that Nageki Kurukiyo came home late. There was a large disturbance somewhere. Tanks had been mobilized, many people were killed, and so on and so forth. Long-Armed Demon opened the door of the apartment and gazed at the night sky, as if she suddenly realized something.

At the end of the corroded iron railing, at the end of the twisted night sky, a man in black was standing there quietly as if he was a wet stain on a painting, dirtied by the rain.

He was not smiling. What a rare sight. Long-Armed Demon lowered her head and looked into Nageki's room through its open door one last time.

There, the cheap TV was currently displaying static. There sat the new collar that Nageki bought on Ume's birthday, and it was all dirty now since Ume threw it into the trash numerous times. There was the pile of seafood flavored instant noodles he had bought just because Ume said she liked them.

There were toys.

There were scenic pictures stuck haphazardly on the wall because they liked them or something. And then there was that single picture on the table, a vague portrait of Nageki Kurukiyo's lover.

The person in the picture smiled her rare smile while sitting in a wheelchair. Ume lowered her head and mumbled: "… Thank you for letting me stay."

The picture did not respond. Although she knew this, Ume still walked quietly out of the door, her braids waving. It would be such a bother to take the stairs. She jumped – and landed in front of Zekiguchi, who was standing still in front of the apartment complex.

He had lupine eyes, and no one had ever seen his true appearance.

He was perhaps the loneliest person on earth. He was Ume's benefactor. He was the Greater Fragment called Ultimate Shield The Weakest
. His role was that of the fake Messiah.

"Hey, Ume-chan. So you are in this apartment complex after all."

"… I heard something from Guriko."

Ume replied in a low voice, ignoring the mysterious words that Zekiguchi Nashinori started to speak. Briefly, Zekiguchi had a puzzled expression. Then, as if he was happy, his shoulders shook a little.

Ume still asked him that question.

"Why did you give me this power?"

"…"

The power of the Greater Fragment called Ultimate Shield The Weakest
was apparently the alteration and modification of the flesh. That was what Sterilization Disinfection had said in the Eternity Institute. The so-called alteration of the flesh was Zekiguchi changing his own body and changing his own appearance and physical make-up.

Modification of the flesh was him changing others' bodies.

According to Guriko, that Berobōchō was also modified by him. That robber Shigue Benimaru, who was originally a human, was modified into a humanoid monster made of blades. That was the result of Zekiguchi Nashinor's modification of the flesh.

The 'role' of Ultimate Shield The Weakest
was the Devil, otherwise known as the fake Messiah.

The Bible recorded that the false Messiah would modify all of humanity, and would rule over them after he turned them all into mindless puppets. The result would be the collapse of society and the arrival of the six-hundred-and-sixty-six beast that ultimately destroyed the world.

The world and humans both would be annihilated, with only souls

arriving at the world of the dead to receive the final judgment. Humans who had been possessed by demons would be like monsters, and would inherit their ferocity.

Then she must be a creature like someone possessed by a demon, right?

She was possessed by the demon named Zekiguchi Nashinori. She deviated from the life of a person and took away human lives. She acted as the henchmen of the devil.

A monster.

A demon.

She had been modified into something like this.

Her abilities, those invisible hands, were probably obtained from Zekiguchi as well.

Although Zekiguchi said he had simply enhanced Ume's existing supernatural abilities, Ume wouldn't have been so useless if something like that already existed back then. That was probably all the result of Zekiguchi's modifications.

That powerful ability had nothing to do with Ume's original talents and had been given to her by Zekiguchi. He didn't say that he did it all. It was probably – no, it was definitely to hide his involvement. Ume finally realized this recently. Zekiguchi could not trust others even till the end. He did not trust anyone due to his experiences with betrayal, and he did not even accept kind acts by others. He despised the strong sentiments of gratitude Ume expressed towards him in the past, and therefore did not trust her enough to tell her how he had given Ume her powers.

Ume felt sorry for Zekiguchi.

If he hadn't hidden his involvement and said it straightaway, then Ume would have frankly thanked him.

"Ah…"

A dubious expression appeared on Zekiguchi's face. He bent his tall figure in front of Ume, who was without arms as usual. A foreign-looking woman was being carried on his back, and her body kept dangling limply from side to side as if she was a ghost.

He thought about something briefly and laughed suddenly, then he opened his arms with fake kindness.

“Ah, never mind, this is almost over. There’s no need to hide anymore. Ume-chan, do you want to meet Berobōchō at the Eternity Institute?”

“Mmm, I want to meet him then kill that robber.”

Aizawa Ume looked at Zekiguchi and nodded firmly. He smiled bitterly.

“… I see. You are a bit too simple. I created many similar soldiers like him all over the place. I probably won’t tell you where they are before my final goal is reached. Mmm, it’s problematic to have too many suitable soldiers sometimes too. I’ve been changing people into monsters all over the place recently. That fits my ability too.”

Then, although Ume had already been somewhat expecting it, she still felt sad upon hearing this cruel fact from Zekiguchi himself.

“That ‘Berobōchō’ was human once too. He had slaughtered too many people, and was therefore particularly fearsome after he became a monster. I was really looking forward to Shigue Benimaru. He had some great properties. After I finished his modification – I got him to attack Ume-chan’s home to test his capacities.”

“…”

Ume’s heart thumped as she felt an overwhelming trauma. She recalled that despicable scene she never wanted to remember again. Her father was pierced through from the back of his head by Shigue Benimaru’s knife, and the tip of the knife was showing through the bleeding wounds on his face. Her mother was yelling for Ume to run even in her last moments. The robber was looking at her. He had an ominous smile on his face. Her own body was being cut up. Her hands were being turned into black and red chunks of meat.

“Ah! Hah…”

Zekiguchi Nashinori left out a long, shivering sigh.

“But that was a failed experiment. ‘Berobōchō’ was a soldier that was modified from a human to a monster, but Shigue-kun already killed Ume-chan’s family with his kitchen knife before he even

transformed. Wouldn't that lose the entire point of the experiment? It was too late when we went to stop him. Shigue-kun had almost killed Ume-chan."

He laughed his giggling, enigmatic laugh as per usual.

"I modified Ume-chan into a soldier too on the spur of the moment after we stopped Shigue-kun. If you two were to meet in the Eternity Institute, which one of you would be stronger? Would it be the transformed soldier 'Berobōchō', or a modified soldier like Ume-chan with your supernatural abilities as the Long-Armed Demon? I really want to try that out. An experiment, now that would be an experiment."

Zekiguchi Nashinori smiled, his face full of joy. He spoke cruel words as if he didn't care even if he was despised, as if this was all according to his plan.

For the first time, Aizawa Ume felt that she was not a friend to him, but an experimental animal. She was a soldier that he had an unlimited supply of, and could be exchanged for someone else any time, a soldier who would be discarded as soon as he was done with her. But… But – Ume shook her head. She had a strong feeling that it shouldn't be like this.

"… But Zeki-kun, didn't you save me when 'Berobōchō' killed me?"

"…"

Ume-chan sank into the deepest terror and despair back then.

Her parents had been killed. Her arms were cut off. She was certain her body was going to die, and even her soul was frozen in shock.

That kind of terror was the most terrifying experience imaginable. It was the man in front of her who saved her from all that.

"I still haven't thanked you properly for that." Even now, Ume felt that the person she liked the most was still Zekiguchi Nashinori. He had saved her from the verge of death. What was he thinking back then? She was a clumsy and useless child, just a piece of trash. No one would have considered making her into an elite soldier.

He probably helped her simply out of sympathy.

Even so, Ume was happy. She finally felt his gentleness.

“Thank you, Zeki-kun.”

Those words were from her heart. However, they seemed to melt into the distant night sky.

Ume was aware that she didn’t have the power to change the world, but she wanted to tell him this anyways.

She wanted to thank this foolish good person.

For some reason, an awkward expression surfaced on Zekiguchi Nashinori’s face. “I killed you parents, Ume-chan.”

“Yep, therefore –”

Ume looked up towards the sky at the end. There seemed to be smoke rising up far away. A crystal clear night sky sparkled with stars above the apartment building. The endless stars in the Milky Way twinkled with light. It was wonderful to be alive. Ume couldn’t help but start to laugh.

“Therefore, Zeki-kun, although I am thankful to you, I won’t forgive you either. You killed my parents. You brought me such great anguish…”

With a ‘bam’, her invisible hands began to move. They tore off Zekiguchi’s head. Then they pierced his limbs, abdomen, shoulders, rammed through him, smashed him – specks of blood flew as his body broke apart.

Bam, bam, bam! Crunch, crunch!

Zekiguchi, his body broken into a sight pitiful to behold, still stood unmoving.

Even though his flesh was shorn off, he still stood there. After having unleashed her maddening fury on his body, Ume began to cry. Unbelievably, hot tears swilled from her eyes. Her sight clouded by her tears, Ume said in a low voice.

She was surrounded by a mist of blood, the fragments of bones, shreds of muscle and skin, and shapeless abdominal organs –

And the night sky, and this world dominated by darkness.

As if she was confirming something, Ume said as she used to: “How was it? Aren’t Long-Armed Demon’s arms very very long?”

A sound came out of nowhere, as if the lump of flesh that used to be Zekiguchi but had lost its humanoid shape was replying to her: "… Ah, yes, they are awesome."

It was Ume's first time to be praised. Then – as if nothing happened, Zekiguchi reached out to Ume and caressed her hair.

"… Hehehe."

The blood that dripped down Zekiguchi's hand stained Ume's hair. She smiled and said with a soft voice: "What is Zeki-kun looking for?"

"…"

"Is that goal even more beautiful than my smile?"

He didn't reply. It didn't matter if it was an affirmative silence or not. No matter what – Zekiguchi Nashinori couldn't pronounce his goal even if he were to exchange it for Ume's innocent smile. Ume showed another beautiful smile. She was somewhat happy, but still not fully content.

"… Zeki-kun is such a bad man. You never answered by question."

"I'm sorry." Ume seemed to hear him say these words. She wondered if she misheard…. Huh?

The moment she lowered her head, Zekiguchi's hand pierced through her chest and shattered her heart. Ume's conscious began to fade, and she started to feel drowsy. Her body was placed down in front of the apartment complex and laid to rest on the dry concrete. No one would notice her here, unless they were walking right through this place. Zekiguchi's hand severed her ribs and intercostal muscles, and completely destroyed her heart, creating a hole right through Ume's body. As the vessel that stored the power of the Apple, she would die if her heart was destroyed.

Although she felt the pain, her senses soon dulled towards such a severe anguish. She felt a burning sensation, but was not particularly uncomfortable.

In comparison, the rather warm blood that flew out of her chest made her upset.

Ume thought she didn't die a clean death.

Aizawa Ume had always been considered dumb by others. She really hadn't accomplished anything in her life. She died before she could affect the world at all.

Of course, strictly speaking, she had already been killed a few years ago by 'Berobōchō'.

But now she had finally reached her end. Even conscious movement was beginning to feel unnatural.

Her life was disappearing with her flowing blood. Ume was reminiscing about her short life. What an ordinary life. She didn't even have a romantic love affair. Her life had just started, then why did it had to end so quickly? Ume thought this with some confusion.

Although she felt unsatisfied, she was somewhat relieved that her death was approaching quickly.

This would all end.

She wouldn't have to think anymore.

Tiredness, hard work, pain, everything would soon become nothingness.

She kept experiencing death and pain from the moment she became Long-Armed Demon. She was a ghost that should have died, but she was given an unnatural life and made to carry a profound sin, and murdered countless people.

She was very sorry. She could only be very sorry.

Her parents, murdered by 'Berobōchō', would probably be very sad if they knew what Ume had done.

Sorry.

No one would feel sad when she died, stained with blood.

Even in her second life, things had not been any better than being dead. Nothing had changed. She could only say sorry.

No matter the reason behind it, she only managed to worsen her own sin during the time she was kept alive.

That was really, really sad. That was what Ume thought.

“So…” Blood flew out of her mouth and she coughed. As she coughed, Ume continued to whimper: “So…rry.”

Her entire body felt tired. It must be death, slowly enveloping her. She gradually lost control of her flesh. Suddenly, Ume started to shiver out of fear.

She felt extremely cold. Air seeped into her from the hole Zekiguchi pierced through her chest.

Ume started to sob.

“Sorry… sorry… sorry… sorry… sorry.”

She gradually lost her ability to think too. Ume only impulsively yelled out the names of those she loved. “Dad, Mom.” She had killed countless people. She was stained with blood. She carried such a heavy sin with her. No one would praise her, and her life was spent in shamelessness. Her parents would never praise her again. No one would feel sorry for her death, or feel that it was a loss.

“Dad – Mum, I’m sorry…” Ume muttered in a whimper. “… I won’t make it to Heaven.”

She suddenly felt that someone was next to her.

“_”

Someone was trying to talk to her, but she couldn’t hear it clearly. Ume gathered up the last of her strength and opened her eyes again. She saw the person next to her kneel down and took hold of her shoulders, and for some reason, started screaming.

“… Kurukiyo.”

Nageki Kurukiyo.

That detective who lived with her, who had somewhat of a relationship with her. He was crying.

His shoulders kept shaking as if he lost a lover. He howled as if he was crying out against his powerlessness. Ah, that was right. She seemed to remember that Nageki’s lover’s name was also Ume.

“… Sorry.”

Nageki, who was crying for her, was once again experiencing the feeling of losing someone. Ume apologized. She apologized both as herself and as the Ume who was Nageki's lover. She apologized for the sorrow he had experienced.

Ume was somewhat relieved that, although she was dying, someone was crying because of her. She closed her eyes. It would be fine even if she couldn't make it to Heaven –

"I'll be with Ume-chan soon."

When Nageki said those strange words, Ume replied, sharp as usual: "… Pervert."

And with that, the power of the Apple drained completely from her shattered heart.

"Ume-chan!"

Aizawa Ume smiled as she heard the sound of Nageki crying out her name at the very end. Her consciousness completely shut down, and she met her death.

Finale: Unable to Save Based on Love Alone

An uncomfortable feeling lingered at his fingertips after he killed Long-Armed Demon.

No matter how many times he wiped away the blood, no matter how he altered the form of his hand and wrist, that feeling would not disappear. It was a sticky, unpleasant sensation. Of course, it was not the first time he had killed. He should also feel no guilt towards such acts.

"…"

Zekiguchi Nashinori narrowed his eyes and walked forward as he gauged the darkness before him. He carried Breaksun, who had fainted, on his broad shoulders, together with the girl he had obtained from the apartment complex.

"__"

The girl was silent. She simply fainted and was still alive. She suddenly lost her consciousness when they left that apartment complex, as if she was an electronic toy who suddenly had her battery removed. She completely lost her consciousness all of a sudden, and her face was devoid of all expression.

Her name was Usagawa Rinne.

A girl with pale pink hair, whose face still retained a hint of childish innocence.

She was dressed in plain household clothes, and there was nothing particularly unique about her. She had fainted unconscious and was carried on Zekiguchi Nashinori's shoulder. He attacked the apartment building after he sorted out Long-Armed Demon, all for the sake of obtaining Rinne. She was someone whom Zekiguchi must have in order to fulfil his goal.

A blond human with fast reflexes tried to stop him, but he was no match for Zekiguchi Nashinori at the end.

Zekiguchi was the strongest fighter in terms of physical battles amongst all the Greater Fragments due to his power to alter his flesh. This was also something he was very proud of. It was a piece

of cake to dispatch of a human.

But that expression the human showed at the end -

- Even Zekiguchi was not prepared for that expression full of despair and anguish.

He would see that expression whenever he tried to recall the event, if only a little bit. He must have had that same expression on his own face at the beginning of all things, when he decided to act in order to attain that goal, which he was ready to give up his humanity for.

It was an expression full of hatred for the world, full of vengeance for God, and full of curses towards himself. It was an expression full of tears.

"… Don't cry."

Rinne, whom he carried on his shoulder, suddenly said in a low voice. She was probably saying it to the man whom Zekiguchi had left in the apartment.

Suddenly, Rinne looked at Zekiguchi and said: "You aren't crying."

Zekiguchi's head suddenly twitched. His intestines began to pulse, and his chest felt tight. His breathing was somehow only coming out in short gasps. Why was he feeling so anxious all of a sudden?

This feeling - this memory - was beginning to surface.

This was an anxiety Zekiguchi used to have when he was still a human. This was the feeling he had when he pondered about death, about the future, and about the world after this life. This was exactly like it.

"Ahahaha, haha, hahaha."

Rinne suddenly laughed out loud.

Her laugh was a sharp, piercing, almost metallic noise. It made him instinctively feel cold. He felt an indescribable fear when he saw her expression.

Zekiguchi simply must have her in order to obtain his goal. He must have Usagawa Rinne. But would he be able to control her?

Zekiguchi suddenly felt unsure and uneasy.

A startlingly pure beauty sparkled in her eyes.

Her eyes were as clear as if they were mirrors of truth. They reflected Zekiguchi's crying face, crying because of his cowardice born out of fear.

"Crying. Living. Everyone. You. Me."

Ahahahahaha. Rinne continued to laugh.

Old memories started to surface in his mind.

Those were the words Tatsue tearfully said to him when they met in the mansion owned by Sakaki Guryū's parents. She was his adopted sister with no blood relations to him.

- *I'm so jealous of big brother.*

- *I really want big brother's talents.*

- *I want to keep living with an inner strength like big brother's.*

"Hahaha. Tatsue… If you're really jealous of me, then find a way to replace me."

He was in a dark room in the old apartment building. It was a room rented under Usagawa Rinne's name. Sakaki Guryū was sitting in there. A man like him with blond hair, green eyes, and beauty rivaling that of an art piece, was now lying on the ground covered in blood and feeling weak all over.

The lights were not on.

The room was dim. Everything appeared fuzzy.

There were two sets of blankets in the room. The phone that Sakaki Guryū bought for Usagawa Rinne was resting on the pillow. Sakaki's face was full of confusion and slowly reached his hand towards the phone. That was something they used to pour out their innocent love to each other many times with endless text messages.

As long as there was still power in the battery, all the information stored in the memory card could be read.

From ★ Usagawa Rinne
To ★ Sakaki Guryū-sama
Subject ★ Pleasure to meet you
Body ★ Good morning, Sakaki-san. Thank you for gifting me with a phone, but I don't really know how to use it. I'm very slow when it comes to electronics. I'm very sorry. Why did you give such an expensive thing to me? I feel like I'm being cheated. Ah, no, I'm sorry. Umm, I apologize. It's

my first time sending a text message. I'm sorry.

As Sakaki paid for Rinne's phone bills, the two of them sent innumerable messages to each other without hindrance. This was the first message left in her Sent folder from the beginning of everything.

Beep beep. The light of the phone monitor shone on his face. Sakaki Guryū expressionlessly pressed the buttons on the phone.

When they first met, Rinne was always giving out this kind of an impression. She rarely smiled, and she was not good at conversing. As she was discarded by her mother, and her father abused her, Rinne always appeared gloomy and unhappy. No matter how one looked at it, she was a very normal and very unfortunate girl.

From ★ Rinne
To ★ Sakaki Guryū-sama
Subject ★ Please do not call me Milady Usarin
Body ★ Good morning, Sakaki-san. Please stop calling me by that nickname. Or should I say, please stop calling me 'Milady' out in the public…

It's very embarrassing. Um, why are you so… Ah, no, um, I'll be very happy if you can just address me as per usual. Also, are you really working as a teacher at the high school I am going to attend?? Um – Um – Why did it turn out like this?

She was really cold emotionally. Sakaki grinned bitterly when he saw Rinne's messages. Or was it him who was always too egotistical and couldn't tell what was going on around him? He worked so

hard in vain, and yet Rinne felt troubled because of their relationship. What did Rinne regard him as? Perhaps it would be happier for Rinne if she had died in the sea? No one could protect her. She was always getting hurt. Wasn't it enough for her to suffer through such meaningless pain?

She was in so much hurt after attempting to kill herself in the sea. She was then killed by Guriko. Then Mushi tried to strangle her and hang her. She was then turned into a Meat Doll by Sterilization Disinfection. And now Usagawa Rinne was taken away by a man with wolf-like, savage eyes.

Why must she suffer through such cruelty?

Why can't he even bring happiness to a girl?

From ★ Rinne
To ★ Sakaki-san
Subject ★ Edict
Body ★ I give up. I finally got it. It doesn't matter what I say to you. You can call me Milady if you want to. You can even call me Queen if you want to. Ah, no, sorry, I'm getting a bit full of myself. Sakaki-san, how is work? You seem to be visiting me every day. No, um, I don't feel troubled, but I'm a little worried. Why are you so… No - I'm sorry. This is it. I'm deleting this message.

There was this half-written message in the Recycle folder of the phone. Were these messages originally going to be sent to Sakaki's phone? Why did she stop writing them? Sakaki discovered that there were many more discarded messages in Rinne's phone than those she managed to send.

Rinne always seemed to be afraid of something back then. Was she always considering what she would say to him when she composed messages? Was that why she never managed to talk about many of her feelings and thoughts?

Did he really ever see the true Rinne? Did he ever really understood her?

He just wanted someone to rely on him. He wanted to make her happy. Was that not to fulfil his own ego and satisfaction? Those unsent messagets probably contained her true, happy heart.

From ★ Usagawa Rinne
To ★ Sakaki Guryū-sama
Subject ★ Want to die
Body ★ I don't understand. I don't understand. I don't understand anything. I don't understand what you're thinking. Why do you exist? Why are you
interfering with my life? I don't understand. I really want to die lately. I want to escape somewhere. I want to die.

He kept pressing on the phone's keyboard. There were many words that he didn't understand after the phrase 'want to die'. If Rinne was an ordinary person, then she must have had times when her mind was unstable. Sakaki just wanted to gently hug Rinne, who was no longer here, and at least comfort her with words such as 'it's going to be alright'. But she was not here.

Why couldn't he stay beside Rinne?

He sunk into deep thought as he manipulated Rinne's phone out of boredom. Gradually, Rinne's messages changed and had more content in them.

From ★ Usarin
To ★ Sakaki-san
Subject ★ Edict
Body ★ I never used to believe that just chatting with someone can make me so happy. I didn't know I could laugh, either. Now I feel as if I was a
completely new person. This is very interesting. Ah, I'm a girl after all, so I'm going to try challenge cooking. The information I attached is concerning that dish. Thanks to Sensei, I keep buying food to eat, and now my weight is starting to get out of control. I should probably pay attention to what I eat. By the way, I still don't know the name of that dish. It was vegetable and meat stir-fried together and sprinkled with salt. What about this…

Rinne would start to cook dishes that both tasted good and looked healthy ever since then. She created many strange-looking dishes. If Sakaki found the flavor to be passable, then she would be very

satisfied and conclude that it was a masterpiece.

Sakaki smiled softly when he saw Rinne's message.

When Sakaki met Rinne for the first time, he also realized that just chatting with someone can make him so happy. Was he smiling? Sakaki wasn't sure. They were already like friends with similarities to each other. That was how Sakaki and Rinne were like. They met as if they were destined to be together. She was a woman that he was fated to love.

Rinne.

Why - why were they now separated by monsters they didn't even know, and had to exist apart from each other?

They were so far away from each other. That was what Sakaki felt. They were in such harmony when they sent those messages to each other, and yet right now they existed in worlds incomparably apart. Where did everything start to go wrong?

Guriko's face suddenly surfaced in his mind.

"… Urk." Was that when the oddities started to happen? Did Sakaki and Rinne's ordinary life start to get affected after Guriko's appearance?

Why? He couldn't help but start to shiver.

From ★ Rinne
To ★ Sakaki-san
Subject ★ RE: Confirming
Body ★ Sakaki-san is so shrewd. You saved me, who didn't believe in anything, and allowed me to slowly recover. I can't dislike you anymore. Um, please give me a minute. I'll call you after five minutes. Let me calm down a bit.

Rinne's stubborn and closed heart gradually started to open up. Her stiff expression started to gradually become gentle, and began to like joking with others. When he brought up the question of getting married, Rinne replied affirmatively with a serious expression contrary to before.

Yes, after he received this short message, Sakaki ignored her words and walked straight to Rinne's apartment and started talking with

her. They affirmed their intentions with one other. Sakaki was deeply in love with Rinne, and Rinne was also responding to his love.

From that time onwards, the two of them overcame all the obstacles between them, be it age or anything else, and became lovers who understood each other.

Rinne had some doubts back then. She thought Sakaki was just using her and playing with her. However, after they got to know each other more and made promises to each other, they already established a form of trust and constraint. Rinne trusted in Sakaki, and Sakaki also genuinely loved her. Their trust and promise to each other were tied together tightly in happiness.

Sakaki despised having his life and future planned by others, and to waste his talent on such plans.

This was the first hope he found for himself. This was not a happiness that he obtained through his wealth. Others would probably think him as a fool if they knew about it. He just wanted to stay next to Rinne. He just wanted to listen to her voice and look at her smiles.

That was all Sakaki hoped for, and Rinne agreed to be with him.

But - he failed her promise and her trust.

He failed to protect Rinne.

He could not even fight back against that man.

Sakaki sank into despair and was surrounded by a feeling of powerlessness. *That's enough*, Sakaki thought. *I'm tired. Let me rest a bit.*

Sakaki frequently blamed himself because of his small mistakes when he took care of Rinne, who lost her personality and became a Meat Doll. It was a hellish time. Would such a life momentarily pause after Rinne was taken away from him? Such thoughts briefly flashed through his mind and just for a split second, he felt happy about it.

He didn't want to keep feeling this pain. He didn't want to keep getting hurt. That was what Sakaki thought.

“Sorry…” Someone’s moaning low voice suddenly came through the open door after Rinne was taken by the man dressed in black.

“Sorry. So…rry.”

It was the sound of a young girl. It was the voice of Ume, the girl who lived with their landlord, Nageki Kurukiyo.

Her voice sounded weak, as if it was a mirage about to disappear.

Sakaki could not see anything when he turned his eyes towards the direction of the voice. The man dressed in black knocked him away powerfully and his back whacked against the wall. It felt like all the bones in his entire body were broken.

The best he could do was to move his fingers and use Rinne’s phone. Sakaki also had an Apple within him. He should be able to recover soon - but even so, he did not feel any strength coming back.

Sorry.

That voice had the same sentiments as Sakaki’s mind. She was apologizing because of her weakness. She was apologizing because she couldn’t protect what she wanted to protect.

He wanted to apologize to Rinne.

Tears were flowing down his cheeks for no reason.

Ume’s moaning finally stopped. A silence more unbearable than the pain started to spread out.

```
From    ★ Usarin
To      ★ Sensei
Subject ★ Edict
Body    ★ Hi. It's me, Usarin. Sensei is probably
still very busy after school, but you did say I
can send you a message whenever I want, so I sent
this without too much anxiety. It's fine if you
get upset at me for getting you at a bad time. I'm
home right now. Is Sensei still at school? It's
fine if you ignore me because you aren't feeling
well. Please reply if you have time. I will be
very happy to receive your reply.
```

These good old times. That was a time before they met Guriko - before they knew anything about their destiny. Those messages from Rinne were from that time. As he read through this, someone suddenly appeared at the door.

The man had a rather bent back, and a long fringe covered his face. He was the landlord of this building, a detective in the homicide department - Nageki Kurukiyo.

“Ume-chan died.”

“… I see.”

Sakaki could only give such a reply at this moment.

He rarely talked with that girl, but he did feel sad for her passing. She was so young. She still had so many opportunities for happiness, and yet she already died. It was really sad.

“Rinne was - taken away.”

His own voice sounded like it came from somewhere far away. It was spiritless, as if it came from the bottommost spot of his abdomen. It was full of a powerless, gloomy feeling.

Nagike’s lips shook, and answered in a low, ironic voice: “… We’re so powerless.”

“…”

“But Usagawa Rinne may still be alive. Why are you not doing anything?”

The melancholic detective lowered his head and said this in a low voice as he slowly walked away.

Sakaki was not particularly interested in where he was going - maybe he went to seek out Ume’s killer.

Even if he revenged her, his personal world would not change, and his heart would not be saved. Even so, he will still complete this task.

Even though he was powerless and has no ability to change the world, he will still regret it if he did nothing.

He had stretched out his hand before now in order to save the

person most important to him.

Although he probably didn't have that kind of a power, he will at least – achieve something before he dies.

It was such a miracle to be born in this world. How can he possibly die in despair like this without fighting back and refusing to be God's toy?

He felt his wounds improving little by little. Sakaki gradually felt strength coming back to his waist and legs.

"Rinne…"

He reached out his hand meaninglessly. It was pitch black before him. Even so, Sakaki Guryū had no other choice.

Ring ring.

"…?"

The phone in his hand suddenly started to ring. Sakaki was startled, and he stared at the screen.

An impossible name appeared there.

```
From    ★ Usagawa Rinne
To      ★ Everyone in the world
Subject ★ Mirror mirror, Mr. Mirror
Body    ★ Who is, the most beautiful, of all?
```

"What is this?"

This might be someone's prank. Why would anyone send such a meaningless message?

As Sakaki thought this, many text messages, bearing exactly the same content, kept coming in.

Mirror mirror, Mr. Mirror. Who is, the most beautiful, of all?

The phone kept receiving this message over and over until the entire storage capacity of the phone was flooded full.

At the end, with a final ring, a particularly shrill sound rang out, indicating it had received another message.

This was the final one.

From ★ Usagawa Rinne
To ★ Everyone in the world
Subject ★ Finally, the end is almost here
Body ★ This is the story about the most beautiful Snow White in the world. There was no need to search for the mirror of truth. The jealous queen –
the witch – knows this. Ordinary people such as the hunter cannot reach her. The poisoned apple cannot kill her. This is the true identity of the Snow
White who merely waited for her prince to arrive. God is the one who decides who is the most beautiful of them all, right?

Why wouldn't his body stop shaking?

Sakaki held onto the phone in his hand, and kept looking at those ominous words being displayed.

He suddenly noticed that someone's shadow blocked the moonlight coming through the open door.

Someone was standing at the door.

Was it Nageki Kurukiyo again? Sakaki thought this, but he instantly crossed out that idea.

Ring-ring. There was the crispy sound of bells.

"… Compared to talking to yourself pointlessly, it's better to work on a little game that requires a bit of brain power."

This person did not make an introduction, but only made some short and strange comments.

"Humans use their brains to detect the world. The senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch – they use these five senses and the associated sensory organs to feel and to understand this so-called world. But what if all your five senses were empty from the moment you were born? Can't see or hear anything, not even having a concept of darkness that we can imagine, but instead experiencing utter emptiness. The world would not exist for someone like that."

It was the sound of a woman. He felt that he had heard her voice somewhere before.

It was a voice that felt nostalgic for him, but Sakaki didn't understand what she meant at all. He seemed to understand what she said – and yet he didn't really understand. It wasn't as if he couldn't understand anything, but he didn't understand what she meant to accomplish by coming here and saying these words.

It was a foreign woman with bells attached to her long blonde hair.

She wore a tight black suit set. She looked graceful, and had a pair of sunglasses over her eyes and had gloves on, veritably as if she was a member of the mafia that just walked out of a movie.

The woman was not being distracted by her own appearance, and kept saying more alien words with a serious tone:

"Then, if there were someone who controlled all the sensory organs of the entire human race…"

It was a detached, cold, and yet slightly sad tone.

"That person would probably be the existence that encompassed the existence of every human in the world, isn't it? Does such a thing really exist? Your sight might be fake, hearing might be fake, scents might be fake, tastes might be fake, and touches might be fake. We paid attention to all this. Yet could it be that, the conception that someone was there was only an illusion?"

She stretched out her arms and spoke more enigmatic words.

"No one doubted that. Everyone believed firmly that some form of existence is definitely out there. Then does an existence like that really exist right there, right now? Does It exist or not? Does It really exist, or was it only a product of our imagination?"

"…"

Sakaki couldn't understand what she was trying to say, but he was getting a little scared.

"Did you ever ponder about such things?" The woman kept talking about that incredulous concept with a low voice.

"Everyone was living under an illusion. The you over there is not

the true you. Your entire existence is the imagination of some other person. Some other person's five senses were stimulated by illusionary stimuli and created this imagination of you. You only exist because he or she imagined that you are here."

What – did that mean?

She was saying that I, Sakaki Guryū, is only an illusion? That my true self does not exist, but I am only an illusion created by someone else? No one knew about this, so everyone shared this hallucination, that of my existence?

Just thinking about this made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

I – do not exist here? The person here was only a person from everyone's collective imagination?

Hehehe, the woman began to laugh. She also showed a very lonely expression.

"Rest assured. You do exist right here. You are not a figment of imagination. But do not come to such conclusions so eagerly, Sakaki Guryū. Indeed, no one can completely eliminate their suspicions about whether we truly exist, whether our ordinary daily lives are only a dream or an illusion of someone else's, No one can completely discard such doubts. I, too, am scared of this possibility."

"I…"

Sakaki looked at this woman with uneasiness. It was as if he had once seen her from far away.

She was a woman who couldn't save anyone, who couldn't change the world, who couldn't protect the things and people she loved. She could not affect the world in any way - and therefore she could not confidently conclude that her existence was not an illusion.

"If God really exists, then even He would keep having that kind of fear. If one is incapable of letting others hear him, or if one cannot see, then the perceived reality of existing in this world would completely crumble."

The woman said in a low voice as if being pitiful of something.

“Everyone more or less know some legends about God. One may be nonchalant about it, or may instinctively find it to be familiar, but we cannot even decide if that was just an imagination. Hey, Guryū, maybe God really doesn’t exist.”

Everyone had, at least for a split second in their lives, had this doubt.

This woman, who had always firmly believed in God, was very much in doubt of His existence at this instant. She walked up to Sakaki, who was collapsed to the ground, held him up, and caressed his hair.

“Even if God does not exist in this world, your own existence is a reality and not an illusion. Even if you only have a very brief window of opportunity, your existence at this place and at this time may be able to change the world. Therefore, don’t give up. Hurry up and start to act, Guryū.”

She then turned and prepared to leave, but - who was she?”

“…Ah.”

Sakaki opened his mouth. Many questions surfaced in his mind, but he could not clearly articulate them all.

The woman turned her head and smiled at him: “My name is Sakaki Joker.”

Yes. Sakaki recalled her now. Little wonder he felt that he had met her before.

“I was born in America, and your father brought me here - I wanted to meet you a few times before, but I was rather scared, and only managed to show myself now.”

Her face was more unfamiliar than he remembered because of those glasses. He had heard of her existence from his father a long time ago, and he had seen the few pictures of her accessible to him – this woman had the countenance of Sakaki’s mother.

“Guryū, I had just guaranteed your actual existence. Without such a warrant, even I can degrade into a mere illusion. You exist, right here, right now. Therefore, even if you only have a very short amount of time, you need to go and change the world. Don’t forget that. Don’t give up. Hurry up and start.”

The woman then turned back and walked away.

Sakaki looked at her. Her figure seemed so strong, as if she would not accept anyone's feelings, whether benevolent or malevolent. However, just for a brief moment, Sakaki felt a sliver of her nebulous gentleness.

"I did not fulfil the duties of a mother at all, and I did not fulfil the role of a wife towards Ganhō."

Those words were empty. They held no feelings of remorse.

"If only we did not lust after eternity. If only we did not seek Heaven and God. Ganhō sank into madness due to his never-ending greed, and dragged me down with it. You, me, Ganhō, and Tatsue - we discarded our happiness, and did not manage to live together as a family."

"Mother!"

The word tumbled out of his mouth so naturally. He didn't know why she always looked so sad. Joker's back violently shook once, as if she was shocked. She then bent down slightly.

"I don't like this. At end - just like my own mother - I didn't - "

She muttered in a low voice as if speaking to herself as she pushed opened the door.

"I am afraid we won't see each other again. That's why I wanted to see you now. I've always looked forward to meeting you, but I never came because I was afraid. I'm sorry. Have you been lonely? I didn't learn how to love others, but you and Tatsue found that on your own. Therefore, I - Mom - respects the two of you very much, Guryū."

I wish you happiness - The woman calling herself Joker disappeared at the entrance of the apartment with these muttered words. Sakaki felt lost. He simply watched her walk out as his brain thought in a fuddled way.

He gradually realized that he was encouraging him, her own son, in her own way.

But - why couldn't he feel her presence at all? What if Sakaki himself was an illusion after all? What if his mother, the woman

calling herself Joker, was also an illusion? At the end, he still could not completely refute the possibility that even the entire world could be nothing more than illusion.

The night deepened in this ambiguous world.

25%

"… Meat Doll?"

"Mmm, do you know of it, Single Room?"

Gankyū Eguriko, Nikuyama Kajiri, Saibara Mina, and Saibara Mitsuki - these four people with supernatural abilities had completely smashed through the tanks, and had then begun to chase Zekiguchi Nashionori, who took away Breaksun.

However, the damage the tanks dealt to the town was too extreme, and it was hard to pick up Zekiguchi's trail. The once bustling shopping street had sunk into a sea of fire, and scorching flames lit up the sky. Still, Guriko was very adept at detecting the presence of powerful monsters. Apparently, Snake - Takamikado Mitaka - was also very good with this ability. Guriko wasn't sure why. She wondered if the two of them were similar in any way.

Any reason would do.

Either way, it would be somewhat difficult to catch up to Zekiguchi with Guriko's current abilities and stamina.

Zekiguchi held the Greater Fragment named Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, and was a very powerful opponent.

It wasn't hard to track him. However, as Poison
Catastrophe
, the piece he took away – Breaksun – periodically activated her ability to corrode cause and effect in her unconscious state due to her natural ability to conceal herself, they often lost track of those two. For Guriko, who was chasing them, this ability was very problematic.

"Meat Doll…? Mmm – I might have heard of that."

Guriko and her group were helping Single Room in order to return

Rinne to normal.

Just like this, this group was united in chasing down Zekiguchi Nashinori, who took away Breaksun.

They were assisting Kajiri, and asked him to use his ability on Rinne as exchange. It was a fair trade.

Kajiri was worrying about Breaksun, and was answering in an off-handed way.

Mina was a bit behind him and muttered lowly: “Really – it’s not surprising that you haven’t heard of it. One just needs to place an Apple into a corpse, and then it will become a puppet that one can freely control. That’s something I invented myself, by accident.”

She said this nonchalantly. Mitsuki clutched Mina’s hand and swung their hands back and forth in a playful way, as if she was very happy.

“Ahaha. Big sis won’t ever invent something good. She invented some new net to kill cockroaches, some manual miniature hanging ceilings. They are all super boring inventions.”

“I hate cockroaches. Ah – um, I’m gonna get angry if you keep talking about me like this.”

Mina pulled at Mitsuki’s cheeks while looking sternly at her.

What is all this about… Guriko thought in a bored way.

Anyways, they were currently having a serious conversation with Single Room. It was probably better to ignore those two sisters for now.

“Well, what is Single Room’s ability, anyways? Genesis – although that’s what I was told, how can you manage to resurrect the dead or pause the flow of time? If such a thing were possible…”

That was something Mina told Guriko following the event at the Eternity Institute. According to Mina’s words, that was how Single Room’s ability was described in the information given by God Mushi Emperor, an existence that took the ‘role’ of the database of Greater Fragments.

“…Ah?”

Kajiri's expression appeared somewhat disgusted with this. His lips drew back and he bared his sharp canine-like teeth.

"Ah – you mean to make dead people alive again – I won't try that. That's super disgusting."

That was a really unconvincing answer. However, Guriko was not defeated. She held on to the idea of recovering Rinne to her previous state. No matter what she must do, no matter what was required, she would prepare for it.

He was different from what she had heard about him. It was hard to tell that Kajiri was someone who possessed the power akin to that of God.

He had kept running away in the previous fight. Yet if one were to compare him to Mina and Mitsuki, it would be hard to tell which side was stronger.

Kajiri narrowed his eyes and showed a thoughtful expression.

"Urk? So those Meat Dolls… are they corpses? Are we trying to get a dead person to come back alive?"

"If you want to call them corpses, I admit there are some similarities… what should I say?" Guriko was a little confused while Mina, who was more skilled at explaining these things, started to fill Kajiri in. "A Meat Doll, mm, is basically a living corpse that had a Fragment inserted into it and is being forced to move. That's what it's like. Although the body of a human is standing there, there is barely any consciousness left in that. The corpse given the Fragment will become absolutely obedient to the Fragment's previous owner."

She narrowed her eyebrows and asked in a low voice with a slightly questioning tone.

"I also want to ask you something, Single Room. You saved Ki-chan when she was close to death. Did she really completely recover, with no symptoms left whatsoever?"

"I'm Ki-chan. My full name is Mitsuki. Thank you so much for that～"

Mitsuki greeted Kajiri casually as her happy-go-lucky self, with an atmosphere completely different from their previous conversation.

Kajiri was not too pleased with her. He waved at her as if he was waving away a fly, then shifted his eyes away from her instantly.

“Mmm – I don’t understand this at all. I’m rather embarrassed to have you people saying words of gratitude towards me. I ran into Mitsuki by accident when I was looking for Breako, and I remembered that I was also imprisoned once upon a time at a place where time had stopped – I felt some pity for her, so I saved her. I didn’t particularly mean to do it.”

Although he spoke rudely, he behaved in a very kind way.

She could tell even from before that this boy was not a bad person. If they asked him to help Rinne, then he would do the best within his ability. That was what Guriko thought as Kajiri looked far into the distance, fingering the crucifix hanging off his neck. “My abilities feel like those that can modify things. They are different from Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
‘s, and isn’t limited to modification of the flesh. Hmm – how should I say this – it’s something like playing with concepts.”

It seemed that even he couldn’t explain it properly himself. He tilted his head a little and started to demonstrate, his face full of seriousness.

“Mmm, for example, if you compare the entire world to a video game, then I can change the operating system of this game, change the faces and clothing of the characters, and change the appearances of shops. Not just the details, I can also change the type of the game from a role-playing game to a fighting game, or make the enemy so strong that it becomes impossible to win.”

“…Oh, is that so?”

Kajiri was a little surprised to see that Guriko understood this.

“I’m surprised. Ganko. You know about games too? I feel you are very behind the times. Even I didn’t know stuff like video games existed until Breako told me.”

“How rude. I’m very experienced with games. I’ve played the initial FC and even the SFC that followed it.”

“… big sis, what’s a FC?”

“A gaming console that was very popular about a decade ago. Surprisingly, the CPU was only 8-bits. The latest is already heading towards 128. Mmm, Guriko-baby is really behind the times.”

“Why do you even care about such things?!”

The topic seemed to have completely deviated from the original direction. Guriko recovered her serious expression and looked at Kajiri.

“That means there is nothing that you cannot do, correct?”

“Theoretically, I am omnipotent. However, there is a lot of preparation I need to do to activate my ability, so it’s impossible to use it during a battle.”

Kajiri complained about this, but Guriko felt she saw hope.

“Although I won’t be able to understand it unless I actually see the Meat Doll, but that Rinne person was just an ordinary human, right? I think it should be fine if I revert her time to a period when she was still human. That’s how I cured Mitsuki, too.”

“Ah? Really?” An expression of surprise surfaced on Mina’s face, and she shifted towards her eyes towards Mitsuki, who was walking next to her. “Ki-chan, do you still remember what happened in the Eternity Institute?”

“Chirp? What’s that?” Mitsuki tilted her head. Mina seemed to understand something as she saw this.

“Ah, your body was cut up in such a way, I thought it was impossible to revert it to its original form. I even neglected the possibility of reverting time. No wonder you are acting even sillier. Indeed – you reverted to the time before we fought Guriko-baby. If that’s the case –”

Mitsuki listened dumbly to Mina saying words that were very hard to understand for her, and showed an uneasy expression. Did she do something wrong to make her big sis like this? Seeing how the two sisters cared for each other, Guriko couldn’t help but feel a warmth welling up in her chest too.

She would return Rinne to normal! She would revert her to how she was before, and live all over again!

Just imagining such a scene made Guriko feel incomparably happy. Reality was indeed full of hope.

Yes – if they did that, then even her guilt of not having protected Rinne and Sakaki could be somewhat ameliorated. She was happy. Even though she felt she shouldn't feel like this, Guriko felt it was enough to erase her past failures, return to those previous happy days, and go to school with everyone else.

She could return to that quiet and peaceful daily life.

A rare smile surfaced all over Guriko's face, and her finger wiped at the corner of her eyes, which started to be wet with tears. Everyone could get back to how things were before! Everyone could enjoy their previous life!

"Wonderful… Sakaki would definitely be happy too."

Of course, now was not the time to be complacent. They could not be completely sure whether Kajiri would give his all to help them. Such an ultimate ability probably couldn't be used frequently…

Was there anything else he needed to activate such a powerful ability? The world was equally cruel to everyone. It was impossible to have something so all-powerful while at the same time being easy to use.

"Therefore, um – I believe my ability can change time, cause, effect, and fate according to my goal and desired result. It is a powerful ability."

He sighed and said in a low voice as if mocking himself.

"I don't quite know if that is really the case. According to the Bible, God used a week to create the world. He created the world perfectly in six days, and set aside the seventh day as a day of rest. In other words, even God would feel tired or bothered when conducting Genesis."

As he said this, Mitsuki suddenly lifted up her face, as if she was scared.

"Ah … Guriko-baby, NikuNiku, big sis, did you hear something?"

"NikuNiku… is that me? Urk…" Kajiri mumbled, his face full of a loathsome expression. He then immediately put himself on guard

and inspected their surroundings with a serious expression, as if he was a dog.

The neat rows of mercury lamps emitted a weak light. The entire residential area appeared fuzzy due to the darkness. Indeed, there were sounds of explosions in the far distance if one were to listen carefully.

“… Have those tanks moved on to a different spot?”

“Such an incredible sound.”

Guriko sought the source of the sound, her face very stern. It was as if she had heard it somewhere before, a rumbling, rumbling, intermittent sound. She didn’t feel it to be a sound of destruction, but - it didn’t stop. It rumbled.

“This - this seemed to be coming from Kannonsakazaki High School～” Mitsuki said in an anxious voice as she jumped up on top of a stone wall and looked around.

Indeed - she heard that Mitsuki has also attended that ordinary rural high school where Guriko had attended. Yes, the sound was coming from that direction, and it wasn’t too far from here.

“… It seems so. Let’s go. I feel that Zekiguchi’s aura is also coming from that direction.”

As Guriko said this, the rest of them nodded in agreement.

“… Yo. I knew you’d come, Crybaby.”

“You dare to look down upon me, you piece of shit? You are a useless monster who hasn’t even grown into shape.”

The two of them met with the night school as the background. No one walked through the spacious Kannonsakazaki Private High School grounds. Only a dry wind stirred up the sand past them.

“Your words are still so damn cool, Melodia Noise
Tear Song
. Aren’t you the kind of person to take away the souls of human

companions who once worked with you? And also - would you like to have a friendly chat?"

"What fake flowery words. Shut up. I've hated jesters like you ever since the start, Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
."

These were the existences which played hosts to Greater Fragments, those seven equal parts of God's role.

He was a tall man with lupine eyes under his carefully tended fringe - he was Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, Zekiguchi Nashinori.

She was a woman wearing sunglasses and a suit, and had decorative bells tied onto her braided long hair - she was Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, Sakaki Joker.

The two of them had joined together as comrades once upon a time in order to retrieve the power of Apples that only existed within humans. They acted together in everything they did. However, the relationship between them had ceased to be friendly since the events at the Eternity Institute.

Those two had originally fought for their own, very different goals. It would have worked out better if they continued to cooperate instead of fighting, but their unified front was gradually crumbling.

She was no longer a friend of his – or anything else to him. So Joker had resolved to get rid of him – just as she would to anyone who stood in the way of her goal.

Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
's ability is the modification and alternation of the flesh, and can create large amounts of warriors. He also had the most powerful physical combat abilities among the Seven Fragments.
For Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, however, who possessed the ability to crush and manipulate space, she could completely dodge Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
's unblockable attacks.

Therefore, he wasn't much of an opponent for her.

Joker reasoned that she could never lose to Zekiguchi Nashinori in a one-on-one fight. She also still had her ultimate trump card left, so there was no reason to fear.

"…"

Though she thought this, her teeth were still clattering and her legs shook slightly.

"Hehehe." Zekiguchi, with his sharp eyesight, didn't miss this. He laughed very happily. "What's wrong, are you scared, Melodia Noise
Tear Song
? Really, when we fought others before, it was always me and my soldiers who fought for you. Could this be the first time you actually fought with someone for real? Honestly, it's rare that you, who has always been in hiding out of fear, actually put yourself out here… Ohoho, whatever. You are still an astounding
beauty, Melodia Noise
Tear Song
."

"Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, your frivolous tone makes me disgusted. Besides, I've always believed that if it was something important, I should do it myself. I am not someone who's often scared. I just don't really trust the things other people do."

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
made a threatening declaration: "Return Lovesong to me. I don't know what you want to do with her, but she belongs to me. Return her to me!"

"… Ohoho, 'Lovesong'?"

Zekiguchi turned around. Usagawa Rinne was laughing for some unknown reason, and Breaksun had her eyes tightly closed and her head was resting on Rinne's knees. Zekiguchi reached out to Breaksun and took out the golden apple in her blouse, and threw it towards Melodia Noise
Tear Song
.

“Hey, ‘Lovesong’ is this thing, right? Catch.” The golden apple traced a trajectory in the air with a whoosh and flew towards Joker.

“… Stop kidding.” The object made of pure gold suddenly exploded in the air.

Crushing space.

She had used the maximum power this attacking method was capable of to destroy the giant monster called the Dream World Beast - For Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, who possessed the sensory organ with augmented investigative powers, this was her only means of attack.

The broken gold pieces glittered with reflected moonlight amidst the dust flying through the air. Joker ignored that and simply spat.

“That golden apple was only something ordinary. It was only something that the guy who built the building hid secretly on his own. I don’t know why Breaksun was holding on to it. I’m not interested in treasures with actual physical value, such as gold. Things such as the price of gold are only accessory values this capitalistic era endowed upon the object. I have absolutely no interest in such things.”

Joke roared with a rude tone towards Zekiguchi, who was standing there with ease: “Then, return ‘Lovesong’ - return my Breaksun to me!”

Bam, bam - intense impact waves, together with deafening noises, smashed through the air all around Zekiguchi. The ground was broken and scattered. If she gave out all she had into crushing space, then she could easy blow apart the school building behind Zekiguchi, let alone the man himself.

The ‘role’ of the Greater Fragment Melodia Noise
Tear Song
within Joker was that of the Savior, or the Prophet.

If she used this ability, then she would be able to accomplish what the Prophet Moses achieved in the Bible. The sea would split in half before him as he lifted his staff. She had the ability of actualizing impossible miracles into reality.

Coldly, she looked sideways at Zekiguchi, and paid attention to

Breaksun, who had fainted behind him. Breaksun - ‘Lovesong’ - was the vital ingredient in ensuring Joker’s safety. How could she endure having Breaksun being taken away from her by someone like Zekiguchi?

Powerful vibrations swept through the air. Just as Zekiguchi said, this was the first time Joker had seriously fought with others, and this was a fight she knew she had to win.

However -

“Making such a loud noise at school at night would bother the people living around here.”

A high-pitched and taunting voice suddenly sounded. There was no need for her to check. Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s ability was to manipulate everything within space. Everything around the school was within Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s control. No matter what approached her - she would not miss even an ant coming near.

“… I’m a little busy right now. Kids should hurry home and sleep.” Joker said in a low voice.

Yes, a kid - the red-haired boy was coming straight through the main school doors, and smiled while exposing his sharp canine teeth.

“Ha! You are really arrogant. Hmm – crushing space, I saw that. You are Melodia Noise
Tear Song
. You look like you believe yourself to be really important. There really are people who play the ‘role’ of the Savior everywhere.”

The boy’s red hair moved with the wind in the night, as if he had a ponytail.

The intruders behind him were Gankyū Eguriko, and the Sterilization Disinfection and Unpleasant Counter-Current sisters.

Even the Pale Horses didn’t manage to finish them off.

That was fine. It was not something completely unexpected.

Joker pondered this. The situation was getting rather troublesome for her. All sorts of things kept happening, and this upset her. Just when would she be able to enjoy a peaceful life where there was no anxiety or dissatisfaction?

“Besides, ‘let her go’ is my line.”

The boy said in a low voice, as if mocking himself, as he looked at Breaksun.

His tone was somewhat joking, but his expression was terrifyingly stern. Zekiguchi still smiled happily, while Joker responded with a very tense expression.

This boy was more than just a simple child.

Her soul – the memories of Melodia Noise
Tear Song
sleeping within her body – awakened. Her terrifying enemies had brought Breaksun here, got Joker to come out like this, and had created all this. This aura, this atmosphere; could it be…

“You are Single Room?! I heard you disappeared from where you were sealed, but I didn’t expect you to be here! Why are you standing in my way?”

“So you are indeed Melodia Noise
Tear Song
. Oh, you also have disagreements with Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
? Your previous reincarnation – or the reincarnation before that, I can’t tell - Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, Poison
Catastrophe
, Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
; you guys sealed me up. I will never forget that hatred!”

A killing aura permeated throughout Single Room’s body. He held onto the crucifix hanging off his neck tightly, and pulled it outwards as if he was going to pull it off. Its sharp, knife-like end was pointing directed towards them.

“No matter what, let her go! I am going to watch a movie with her. It was a new work from a very famous director after four years. I

don't know what it is about, but apparently it was an excellent piece of work that shook all of America. Do you think that's boring? It is – but she does not want to use me as Single Room. She was the first one to ever say those silly words to me…"

Single Room continued sincerely.

"… Therefore, return her to me, you bastards! Even if you are unwilling, I will make you willing."

"I refuse. I must have Breaksun in order to not live in terror." Joker maintained her cold expression and kept her pose, ready for battle. Zekiguchi Nashinori also kept his delighted smile. His lips were upturned, and his shoulders shook slightly.

Although he looked nonchalant, it increased the pressure he was giving out.

"… Hmm – it seems like we can only take her by force. Let us fight."

"… I'll cover you, Single Room. Rinne is also over there. Although I don't know what happened, I will take her back as well."

Guriko walked up as she said this. Mina and Mitsuki also took out their respective weapons.

"Yes – hmm, though I've achieved my goal, I should probably still help out of a sense of morality. Those really dodgy people are probably superfluous to keep on this earth anyways.

"Hya, I'm helping NikuNiku too~ Yay, no matter who you are, come at me~ Uuu – Mitsuki-chan will do her best –"

Unpleasant Counter-Current held tightly onto her gloves of retribution.

Sterilization Disinfection took out the spray cans that could annihilate everything.

Single Room held onto the crucifix that had the power to create heaven and earth.

The bells tied onto Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's long hair kept ringing, sending out hypnotic tones into the

air. Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
also created a shield out of flesh and held it in front of him as a weapon. Guriko, too, held on to a few spoons, her beloved weapon of choice.

"…"

Suddenly, Rinne looked expressionlessly towards them. Guriko felt that.

"… Rinne?"

"– What's wrong? Will there be fighting?"

She allowed Poison
Catastrophe
, who twisted cause and effect, to lie on her knees. She mumbled for some unknown reason, looking idiotic and awkward while at it. No one could tell whether she could hear what was happening, and she mumbled as if it had nothing to do with her. "Isn't everyone – the same?"

As if they took that as a signal to start, the non-humans with supernatural abilities sprang into battle.

Their goal was Breaksun – the woman called 'Lovesong'.

An unprecedented change was occurring within the Meat Doll named Usagawa Rinne. This change was destroying the personality Usagawa Rinne had had since now. She was currently being destroyed, with her soul awakening - the Meat Doll herself could not comprehend this.

The so-called near-death experience allowed people to obtain an extraordinary ability during that time, and also prompted an awakening to one's beliefs. It was perhaps a feeling like that. As the soul walked towards the distant shore, it was neither alive nor dead. The ends that the soul of the Meat Doll and the soul of a human gazed upon were ultimately different.

The Meat Doll couldn't see anything at that instant, but was gazed upon by everything else. She could not hear any sound, but was heard by everything else.

Her senses became sharp, but that was to be expected. There was also no joy or happiness for her. It had perhaps been like this since a long time ago, but she just couldn't feel it. Rinne's world had always been like this. Tears fell down. The hot liquid rolled down her cheeks and dropped down her chin.

"…?"

Why would she cry? She didn't know. She just - couldn't control it. She felt empty.

In order to forget what she was feeling right now, Rinne pointed to the things around her in order, and called out their names one by one.

As if this was the only way to make herself feel rested, to show that she indeed existed here, and to make her heart feel fulfilled.

The surroundings of the school had already been enveloped by people with red eyes without her realizing it. There seemed to be a few - rather, a few dozens - of these people. They had different expressions, and they stood aside, silently watching this battle to the death between the Greater Fragments.

No. What they looked at was Usagawa Rinne. As if they were waiting for Snow White to wake up, they simply sat and knelt down around her and watched her.

The Meat Doll began to feel terrified and immediately turned her gaze towards Gankyū Eguriko, who was still fighting.

Guriko was currently engaged in a melee battle with Zekiguchi Nashinori. She had just gouged out his eye ball. "Eyeball!"

There was no change to the fight till the end. Breaksun started to sing incomprehensible songs in Rinne's arms as if she was talking in her sleep. She was sleeping on the Meat Doll's knees, and twisted her body as if she was a baby throwing a fit as she sang a chant wishing for peace all over the world, for people to love each other, a hymn of longing towards God.

"Love… Song."

It was as if they were expecting something to end in this place, in the center of the world.

50%

Gankyū Eguriko's used a pose as accurate as a precise machine to gouged out eyeballs.

The spoon in her hand aimed and extended with a lightning fast speed as if it was a thrown marble, and pierced into Zekiguchi Nashinori's completely undefended eyeballs, the entrance to his brain. It entered the eye socket at an angle and pierced right through, completely disrupting the contents within.

Guriko's target was Zekiguchi Nashinori.

He was the man who killed her a thousand years ago.

And now he had taken away Rinne for an unknown reason. He was still an obvious and dangerous enemy for her.

"Zekiguchi!"

Zekiguchi looked as if he didn't feel the fatal damage to his brain at all. He was still terrifying. Zekiguchi Nashinori was the leader of Long-Armed Demon and Berobōchō. He was the Greater Fragment named Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, one that had the ability to alter and modify the flesh.

Guriko was very aware of the power of a Greater Fragment after having fought them numerous times.

However, it was as if this man could not feel anything after receiving damage. What should she do? If she didn't know what to do, then she should just kill him.

"If you touch Rinne and Sakaki, then I will chop you into pieces!"

"Hehehehe."

An eyeball immediately regenerated from the emptied eye socket. Not only that, three or four new eyeballs also inexplicably grew out

of Zekiguchi's face. He did not change at all, still as despicable an opponent as before. She felt like her attacks were not working at all.

"Usagawa Rinne-san is an existence more important than you were ever aware of. That's why I'm putting her under my care – as for Sakaki-kun, hehehe," Zekiguchi Nashinori laughed enigmatically, "would you be upset, Yono, if I said that I… killed him?"

Guriko's sight instantly went red.

No one attacked her, but blood spurted out from her head. Her logic was instantly reduced to ash and an explosive torrent of emotions tore out of her. Guriko suddenly became incredibly excited, as if the current situation had nothing to do with her.

She kept filling up, kept filing up.

Guriko's left arm creaked and began to change.

Her soft skin metamorphosed into red, carapace-like armor. The sharp claws at her fingertips extended out as if they were knives.

Apart from her arms, her legs, feet, shoulders, face, and even the color of her hair changed their appearance after sensing Guriko's excitement and rage. Endless threads suddenly grew out of Guriko's back with a whoosh, and instantly intertwined with each other and formed a pair of wings. As if she was an avenging witch, Guriko revealed her original form, the shape of a devil.

"Oh – " Zekiguchi opened his mouth as if he was about to make a joke, but he was too late. Guriko's left arm, which had completed its transformation, instantly pierced his chest right through the middle. Right now, Guriko's entire body was only full of power and the desire to destroy and to kill. What was left of her humanity had been completely eroded away, and all that was left was the evil parts full of destruction.

Apples, which immortals such as Guriko use as the source of their supernatural powers, otherwise known as the Fragment, were contained in their hearts.

Of course, if their hearts were destroyed, then the power of the Fragment would flow away and their existence would completely crumble and die.

Even Zekiguchi should die very quickly according to this logic.

“Ohoho, dangerous.”

He laughed casually and jumped backwards, ignoring the giant wound in his chest, creating some distance between him and Guriko. Although his blood and flesh flew everywhere, Zekiguchi was not dead. The man with wolf-like eyes was so happy for some reason – he showed a happy expression as if he was playing with children.

“Yono, you didn’t change at all. You could kill without any hesitation. But what a pity. My ability is the alteration of the flesh, so the location of my heart could be anywhere.”

“Then – I will completely cut you up.”

Guriko did not stop. If she completely dissected her enemy, then she could return to the happy life with Rinne and Sakaki.

If she can get rid of all these problems, then she can experience those happy times again.

Guriko fought as she held onto only these expectations. No matter how despairing it was, she should be able to get there as long as she reached out.

“Hehehehe, how annoying. Don’t get so seriously angry, Yono. No more jokes. Sakaki-kun isn’t dead – oh!”

A pair of black wings similar to Guriko’s began to form
on Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
’s back after dodging the spoons that Guriko threw towards him. He flew high into the sky in the pitch-black night.

He flapped his wings and escaped towards the sky. Was he trying to make time to cure his wounds? No, she can’t allow that.

She will chase him and defeat him during his escape, and completely annihilate him.

“How foolish, Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
!”

This was suddenly heard beside them.

It was the astonishing woman who had just dodged a fatal blow as she fought Mina, Mitsuki, and Kajiri all at the same time. It was Melodia Noise
Tear Song
.

She arrived next to Guriko and Zekiguchi in their one-on-one fight, and looked up towards Zekiguchi, who was flying in the sky. She smiled with one side of her mouth tilted.

“This weakling is almost dead. Since he is already wounded, then go completely destroy him. If he fell once, then he will fall again. This is how the world is – fall all the way to Hell!”

With a whoosh, her fingertips, clad in black gloves, moved downwards as if in command.

Zekiguchi instantly lost control of his wings and fell straight down from the sky. His face was full of surprise.

“What’s to be surprised about, fool?”

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
smiled coldly, and the innumerable bells tied to her hair started to ring.

“As long as you’re in the sky, whether gliding or flying, you would fall to your death without the support of the wind. Isn’t that simple? My ability is, indeed, the manipulation of air.”

Zekiguchi fell down as she spoke. The surprise and fear previously on his face passed swiftly, and only a delighted smile surfaced on his face.

It was slightly unsettling -

“You’re not as powerful as you make yourself sound like. You are indeed the weakest, just like your name.”

The countless bells in her hair suddenly began to ring, making a chaotic ruckus. That was her signal - the signal for her ability to crush the very space.

“You’ll be dismembered!”

Following her words, Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
‘s body - Zekiguchi Nashinori’s body - exploded.

“Hehehehe.”

In the blink of an eye before his demise, Zekiguchi made a laugh as if he could not hold it back anymore.

It was all as he expected, but just a little bit more scary than usual. His wish will soon be fulfilled.

The story of Snow White, where the jealous queen was the final victor.

“Oh.”

A confused sound came from the center of the school. It was Rinne, who was confused and had yet to wake up.

At the last moment, before Zekiguchi was blown to smithereens, his right hand extended at an astonishing speed as if it was a snake or a whip, and wrapped tightly around Rinne and Breaksun, with the latter sleeping on Rinne’s knees.

“Wah - ” The two of them were wrapped up together and thrown violently towards the school building.

“Now it will be - round two.” With this, Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s Crushing Space squashed his body into pieces.

“Breaksun!” The first to respond was Single Room - Nikuyama Kajiri - who had stepped away a little from the battle and was preparing his ability in secret.

He had finally put some distance between himself and the nervousness that came with battle, and managed to look at the entire scene with a clear head and gauged the situation on both sides.

It was a fight that they had the advantage of. They had Sterilization Disinfection, God’s Judgment and Digestive Organ.
Her Genocide Justice
Annihilation Mist
could ignore all defenses and armor and erase them all.

Moreover, no matter what kind of a form Ultimate Shield The Weakest changes into, or what kind of invisible walls of defence Melodia Noise Tear Song could build with her manipulation of space, Genocide Justice Annihilation Mist could pierce them all and attack the opponent directly.

Due to her ability, even immortals cannot recover from the wounds she dealt out.

Sterilization Disinfection was fighting against Melodia Noise Tear Song.

Melodia Noise Tear Song determined the positions beneficial to her according to her power to control space, and dodged attacks as she used her ability to impact space to counter-attack. Whereas Unpleasant Counter-Current - Mitsuki - was helping by reflecting back Melodia Noise Tear Song's Crushing Space through her own powers of retribution, putting Melodia Noise Tear Song into a situation where she could not fight back.

"Rinne!"

But Melodia Noise Tear Song, already in such a situation, suddenly joined into the battle between Guriko and Zekiguchi and completely annihilated Zekiguchi.

The situation had changed. The goal behind this battle was not just to kill the opponent, but to take back Rinne and Breaksun.

These two should be of the highest priority.

However, Breaksun and Rinne were wrapped up in Ultimate Shield The Weakest's stretched arm and thrown towards the school building.

Although they were also immortals and probably wouldn't die from it, he can't just leave them alone.

Kajiri walked towards them.

Before Kajiri's eyes, Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, Guriko, Mitsuki, and Mina - who lagged behind somewhat - also hurried that way.

Although Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
was killed, Kajiri still had a lingering sense of unease. Even though he exploded into smithereens, his heart might not even have been in that body, and therefore they could not be sure whether they defeated Zekiguchi.

Compared to that - he must take back Breaksun.

Guriko was roaring out something. A pair of crimson wings grew out of her back, and the skin on her entire body became a carapace. She had completely metamorphosed into the shape of a demon.

Just then, Kajiri felt as if a chill was creeping up his back. What was this feeling -

He didn't even have time to think about what was happening.

"Get out of my way, brat!"

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, who walked behind him, released invisible waves to crush space. It was not a bullet or an impact wave, both of which would have a form. She used space itself to attack, making it almost impossible to dodge. A heavy blow landed squarely on Kajiri's back and he fell forward, rolling on the ground.

"And next you will die."

It was a cold, emotionless, terrifying voice speaking above Kajiri.

No! He would end up in pieces if he suffered a blow of her Crushing Space, just like Zekiguchi!

" - I won't let you!"

Suddenly, a shimmering silver light sparkled all around Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's body. They were the spoons that Guriko threw out.

Although the high-speed spoons would have been more than enough to pierce Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s body, they did not touch her due to the thin layer of protective membrane made up of air all around her.

However, this attack was enough to give Melodia Noise
Tear Song
a split second of shock, and worked as expected.

Her body stayed still for just a brief moment, and did not release Crushing Space. Kajiri expected this pause, and stabbed towards her with the crucifix he kept hidden near his body. “You’re the careless one for getting so close to me - idiot!”

Blood sprang out of his body and danced in the air. An unbelievable amount of blood rushed towards Melodia Noise
Tear Song
. These drops of blood, this fountain of Single Room’s power, sparkled with a red sheen.

Although a layer of air surrounded Melodia Noise
Tear Song
and made her untouchable, it was enough to overcome this by initiating an attack right beside her.

“Welcome to my room - bastard!” As he screamed, Single Room prepared to deliver a heavy blow to Melodia Noise
Tear Song
.

“Urk, ah - !!”

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
felt threatened in that instant and instinctively turned her body, leaping backwards.

Kajiri’s blood rolled off the protective layer of air surrounding her and dripped on the ground before it could release its power, staining the ground red. “Tch, what a shame. You are very good with running away!”

“Are you okay, Single Room?”

Guriko was also chasing Melodia Noise

Tear Song
, who ran into the school building, and she knocked in a wall to get inside. Kajiri waved at her and breathed as if nothing had happened, and stood up with ease.

“I’m fine. Thank you very much for the spoons just then. It was a great help.”

“Mmm.”

Guriko nodded and turned around to keep chasing Melodia Noise
Tear Song
. Although he had lost some blood and felt a little dizzy, Kajiri followed her as well.

“Tch. I felt like I got toyed with. I thought it’d be easy to fight her. Did her Crushing Space get temporarily sealed off?”

“Hurry up, Mina, Mitsuki!” Guriko called at the two Greater Fragments who were catching up with them. “Go kill her, kill Melodia Noise
Tear Song
!”

“Indeed - but we don’t need to listen to your commands, Gankyū Eguriko.”

“Ah, big sis, who cares about that. Let’s just get along～”

This chaotic group of people ran along the night school grounds.

The school building at night was dark and gloomy. The innumerable tables and chairs were laid out within the empty classrooms as if they were broken pieces of art.

“…”

As she stood there, Guriko suddenly remembered that it was a very long time ago since she had come to this school.

“Guriko-baby? What are you doing, dazing off over there?” She could hear Mina’s voice.

She signed. It was too early to stop and have a breather. It had just started. Everything will start to get better from now on - she will definitely make everything better.

… But, for some reason, a despicable sense of foreboding lingered within her.

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
- Sakaki Joker - galloped in the corridors and rapidly leapt up stairs. Although she had the body of an immortal and should not feel sensations such as fatigue, she suddenly found that her mind would not calm down for some reason, and felt a little exhausted.

But she only needed to strive for a little longer. She could go back to her previous peaceful and quiet existence after she retrieved “Lovesong”. She was willing to make any kind of sacrifices for that.

“There - “

Breaksun, whom Zekiguchi used the last of his strength to throw away, flew into the third floor of the school building, and rolled into the corridor after breaking through the windows. She was lying in the middle of shattered pieces of glass, an image of a sleeping beauty slumbering in the middle of that sea of glass, which sparkled as it reflected the moonlight.

There should be someone else as well. That other girl, whom no one seemed to recognize, should be here as well, but she was gone.

Did she flew into another floor?

She had always focused her attention on Breaksun and did not notice what happened to the others. If she fully expanded her power to manipulate space, then she should discover the other girl without physically going elsewhere to look for her. However, her enemies were catching up behind her. There was no need to waste the power of her Fragment in this situation. She needed to secure Breaksun first. Joker took the girl up in her arms and sighed deeply.

“_”

Her expression suddenly became terrifying.

Her shoulders shook and she bit her lips hard. She made loud

sounds of grinding her teeth, and roared with humiliation and anger.

“Damn it!”

As Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s power was to manipulate space, all the air around her started to shiver, and all the windows and walls started to shake. As she considered that someone plotted against her, Joker roared again:
“Damn it! This cunning Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
! Damn him!!” She hugged Breaksun and started to use her body’s ability to control space to decipher the situation. Although she immediately understood that this was the worst population - she still had to check if the other was not simply fainted. No, her heart was dug out. Breaksun Hanselmine was already dead.

Joker’s face and body immediately paled into a waxen color.

The wound at her chest was still fresh and her surroundings were completely drenched by blood. She was already dead. Her life was already over.

Her heart was dug out - in other words, the Greater Fragment within her was already taken away by someone.

“Damn it, damn it! Who was it - just who was it!!”

She threw Breaksun’s body on the ground and yelled with rage. This corpse had no use to her.

Joker liked Breaksun’s voice and personality, but their relationship wasn’t so close as to mourn for her death.

Moreover, Joker’s body, which was completely controlled by rage due to not having fulfilled her goal, absolutely had no place to maintain sorrow.

Joker’s goal was only ‘Lovesong’ - Breaksun’s heart. It was the storage facility of Fragments, which was modified by Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, and could suppress the flow of energy to the ultimate degree.

The previous reincarnation of Melodia Noise
Tear Song

and the one before him - no, all the Fragments that Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
and God Mushi Emperor had ever collected from all over the world were kept within ‘Lovesong’, all the way since the beginning. It was a Greater Fragment with an extraordinary density. If that unbelievable source of power can become Joker’s own, then she would instantly heal no matter how great a wound she suffered. She should also be able to approach an state of immortality, close to eternity. It would almost be appropriate to call such an existence ‘God’ - there will be no more fear for her on this world, and she would become an almost omnipotent and undefeatable existence. The problem was that, should she implant a Fragment of such high density into herself, she didn’t know if her body would be able to handle that. But she learnt of a method while she was experimenting in the Eternity Institute -

“Where is it…”

She could not imagine that Breaksun dug her heart out herself.

Then exactly who took it away?

Thanks to Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
‘s manipulation of the flesh, combined with Breaksun’s ability to corrode cause and effect, her own aura was suppressed and people should not be able to sense its great power.

The killer should be to someone with the Fragment. But who would it be? Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
was already dead, and Sterilization Disinfection’s party had not arrived.

Now that she thought about it, the girl that Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
threw here with Breaksun should still be around somewhere.

But she was not here.

“… could it be her? But - no matter what, why would such a girl take ‘Lovesong’?”

Joker bit her lips tightly and started Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s ability to control space and searched for that girl - suddenly!

With a whoosh -

“– Umm.”

She felt something flying rapidly towards her.

It was a circular piece of cutlery sparkling with a silver light - a spoon. Its speed was very rapid, and its power was proportional to it.

However, no matter what might be thrown at her, this kind of physical attack was impossible to damage her, who can manipulate the air.

The spoon came into contact with the air around Joker before it touched her, and bounced off in another direction.

It then flew back towards the direction where it was thrown.

“…”

Those people caught up with her, and she was being very anxious herself - what a bother.

Some people jumped up from the stairway in the depth of the dim corridor. Her enemies - Gankyū Eguriko, Nikuyama Kajiri, Saibara Mina, and Saibara Mitsuki - appeared before her. It was a four-on-one situation, but she did not feel ill at ease, only a sense of being bother. *It was such a bother* - that was what Joker thought.

“Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, return Breaksun to me!”

Kajiri stretched out his hand, but Joker ignored it.

Although Joker wanted to tell him the truth, that Breaksun was already no more than a corpse, she also considered that she could still use Breaksun as a hostage if the others still thought of her as alive.

Anyways, she should annihilate them with her overwhelming power right now, then have a thorough search for that other girl. That was her best bet.

As Joker made her decision, she pressed the sunglasses down her face. She could see the opponents now. She must not have any

sensations of fear or confusion. Were they looking down upon her because she was not a Greater Fragment that excelled in fighting? Did they think the best she could do was already shown in the battle just now?

However - Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's 'role' was the Savior, an existence that chronologically paralleled that of God Himself.

Then, as the strongest, she had no excuse to lose to them.

Her feet shook and her throat felt dry. Many parts of her body was showing signs of fear. "Huff - " She took a deep breath to calm herself down.

" - Ha…" The gap between her and her enemies were getting smaller and smaller. This battle was very important for her, and it was the beginning of making everything better. Everything will be decided by the duel that was being initiated.

She had no intentions of losing. She will kill them all.

She grabbed hold of Breaksun's body and discarded all her doubts.

Firstly - right, this one was the most dangerous of all.

"Sterilization Disinfection!" Joker suddenly opened her eyes. "Petrify!"

Suddenly, the white-haired woman - Sterilization Disinfection - Saibara Mina - made no sound and remained standing on the spot.

As if she had been turned to stone, all her movements ceased all at once.

"Mina!?"

"Sis - what's wrong?!"

As everyone bustled about, Joker sneaked silently towards them. She grabbed hold of Mina's jaw and threw the other woman out of the window without hesitation. The glass window shuttered and Mina's body flew out of the school building.

"… Urk?"

She was prepared to use Crushing Space to fight them and prevent them from attacking her, but surprisingly no one attacked her. While she was being puzzled, Mina slammed into the ground and her blood flew everywhere.

Mmm. Even if Mina isn't dead, she shouldn't be able to move for a while. That way, one of them wouldn't be able to fight. Not bad. As Joker thought this, she looked sideways at the remaining three with her blue eyes, which were shimmering with a cold light.

"— Petrify!"

It was Mitsuki's body that stiffened this time. Even her gloves, which could reflect all malicious attacks, had no effect on Joker's ability. *Why didn't Mitsuki attack me? She also did not have a posture of defense.*

"What - what is this? No way. I don't want this!"

Mitsuki shook her head and stretched her hands out in a panic as she screamed: "I can't see anything! I can't hear anything - I can't even feel anything with my skin. Ahhh. Where am I?"

Mitsuki was shaking badly and sank into a state of panic.

"Where am I!? Where is anybody? Ahhhhhh!"

She was then tossed outside of the building just like her older sister.

See - it was easy.

Mitsuki's body flew out of the window and landed with a bump. She rolled and bounced off the ground, then remained still in a puddle of blood.

75%

Medusa, the monster annihilated by the hero Perseus in Greek mythology, apparently had the ability to change things she saw into stone.

Strictly speaking, Melodia Noise
Tear Song

‘s ability was something else.

It was also an ability that rendered the opponent unable to retaliate, and the condition to trigger it was also locking eyes with the opponent. Through eye contact, she could invade and control her opponent’s five senses.

It could be considered as a negative way to use her manipulation of space.

Humans rely on sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and we move according to those senses.

Even if just one sense was hindered, we would face great obstacles in our daily activities.

If all five senses were to disappear altogether, one would feel as if one was a rock, and would be unable to do anything at all. One would be unable to see, hear, or feel, and so would fall into nothingness as if one was dead.

Blocking off the senses.

That was the supernatural attack of Melodia Noise
Tear Song
- God’s Sensory Organ.

“You guys are hopeless in using your abilities.”

Joker looked sadistically at Guriko and Kajiri, the only two left standing, as if she was playing with the other two within her palm.

“You finally attained the power of one-seventh of God - and yet you let all sorts of marvellous abilities go to waste without even using them. Therefore, you are not the kind to battle like me, but only failed Fragments that excel in investigations.”

Joker was a coward.

She was born this way, and this trait became even more exaggerated after she received the Greater Fragment named Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, which could feel all the malevolence and danger of the world.

She was scared of everything. She was scared of others. She was

scared of the world. She tried her hardest to make herself stronger, and she became like this at the end.

“Damn it -”

Guriko kicked the floor in rage. Although she made all sorts of powerful attacks, they all bounced back uselessly due to the other’s protective air membrane.

Her opponent had the ability to control space. No matter how and where she attacked, the attack would be reflected.

Although she understood this, it would be too lame to just escape like this.

No matter what, it would be very difficult to break through that protective wall of air from the front. It was a protective wall with the air compressed to its utmost limit, and was as hard as rock.

Joker laughed when she was sure of her advantage.

“Ahahaha. You should understand that you have no chance of winning now. Now kindly give it up and die. I won’t let you keep on living - not after you’ve seen my true face.”

“Tch - “

Kajiri also understood the differences between their powers. He showed a fearful expression, and cold sweat seeped from his brow.

It was somewhat cute that the one with the ultimate power was pushed into this kind of a situation.

He had thought he held the supreme ability, and therefore slacked in studying and perfecting his skill. It was shameful for him to be so unacquainted with his power.

“How did it end up like this!?”

Kajiri moaned as he stared at her and said in a low voice: “How did it end up like this? How can an ability like this be used continuously? You don’t need to replenish your energy, and you use it over and over without any recovery time. It’s incredible – you should be exhausting your energy reserves quickly if you’re manipulating air around your body and building defensive walls like that.”

Joker smiled, and her blue eyes looked towards Kajiri.

“Lived so carelessly, without even thought – are you any better than a pig? You are a human. You need to try and analyse everything for your own benefit. I do that even if it can only help me a little bit.”

Although she was prepared to finish off the opponent in one move, she also explained herself to the other two out of interest.

She had already finished off Sterilization Disinfection and Unpleasant Counter-Current. With such an overwhelming advantage, she should definitely be able to win. Indeed, she should be able to easily finish off the opponent whenever she wanted.

Joker took off the clothing she was wearing with a whoosh. She took off her jacket, loosened the buttons of her shirt, removed her pantaloons, and even took off her undergarments.

“Hey – ”

Kajiri swallowed uncomfortably. This kind of behavior was too unnatural. Guriko also opened her eyes with surprise. Her huge, transformed body stiffened.

“… What’s wrong with you all? Could it be that it’s the first time you’ve seen a woman’s naked body?”

Joker was completely naked, and instantly, all over her body –

“Waaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh! Kill me kill me kill me kill me! Please help me please help me please help me! It hurts so much! It’s so disgusting!”

A tragic wail, like a dying scream, tore out of Joker’s body. It was the sound of people full of vengeance and pain.

She always kept a protective membrane of air around her body using her Manipulation of Space. It wasn’t just to protect her from enemies’ attacks, but also to contain this scream from leaking out.

The cry echoed all over Joker’s body.

Her rather thin body looked as if it was in pain – and innumerable human faces suddenly appeared on her skin.

There were faces of both men and women. The majority of them were young. Many of them were still young girls and boys, looking

as if they were still children.

Those were undoubtedly other people's faces.

There were eyeballs and lips. Some of them were even drooling, and some were crying tears.

There were expressions of madness and expressions of joy. Those countless faces, young and old, were all hiding within Joker's skin with incredible density. It was a monstrosity. No, she was a monstrosity.

With her entire body covered with faces, the woman smiled all over her body.

"These are the failed 'Lovesongs'."

"Love – song?"

Joker nodded and caressed the countless faces lovingly as she shed tears.

"A human body is a sensory vessel – a vessel to contain Fragments. Only one can fit into each body. No matter if it is a huge Fragment, or if it was just a normal human, that stays the same. There is an upper limit to the amount of Fragments that can be stored inside a sensory organ. The holders of Greater Fragments have the highest limit. Although many humans possess Apples, they are far beneath the capacities of the Greater Fragments."

That was the law.

No one knew who the person that decided this was. All they knew was that it was previously decided.

However, a law will always have a loophole. Everything that was previously decided will always have a deviant path to circumvent it. That was common sense.

"The bodies of humans who obtain Apples or Fragments will gradually change. The roots of the Apple will gradually grow out. Although they will not show any outward signs, the sensory organ that took the weight of the Apple will already create miraculous effects within the body. More importantly, this kind of change to the body can be inherited."

She pointed at Kajiri and Guriko, then put her hand on her own chest.

“As animals, we are designed to inherit genetic information with our bodies. Therefore, the descendants of those with Fragments or Apples will inherit the unique properties of their bodies. The children of the Fragment holders, who had giant sensory organs, will possess enormous sensory organs from birth.”

“However,” Joker continued, “what they inherit is merely the shape and properties of the body. Of course, the power of a Greater Fragment or an Apple cannot be inherited. Such powers will disappear when their original owners die and their bodies are destroyed, and return to the world itself.”

The girl named Kuroki Tatsue was the child of Joker and Sakaki Ganhō.

However, Joker was registered as dead in the civil records since a long time ago. All mundane hindrances were long gone from her.

The woman who nurtured Tatsue was someone who had nothing to do with the girl and was hired for that purpose. That was why Tatsue had very few emotions towards her, and only desired to gain her father’s praises from obtaining good grades. But Tatsue was Joker’s daughter, Melodia Noise
Tear Song
’s daughter. As to her body’s properties, she had inherited a huge sensory organ and abilities from Melodia Noise
Tear Song
. All she had to do was wait for an opportunity to let her ability awaken.

Then all she needed would be power, and she would be able to use the same abilities as Joker.

“One more thing. As the holders of Greater Fragments, we can include others’ sensory organs into our own bodies.”

Sterilization Disinfection, who was thrown outside the building, had two sensory organs in her head and her heart. Thanks to that, she could keep living even if her head became separated from her body.

“Do you understand now? That’s how it works.”

Innumerable imprints of the human face covered her entire body.

Joker caressed them with her fingers. Guriko and Kajiri observed this, and just barely managed to hold down their feeling of disgust.

Joker felt very pleased. It was so pleasing to push her opponents into a corner and taunt them with words, then behold the expressions of despair on their faces.

Joker, extremely excited, began to talk unnecessarily again: “These are the children of the previous Poison
Catastrophe
, who inherited Poison
Catastrophe
‘s sensory organ.”

Breaksun Hanselmine had seventy-seven younger sisters and sixty-six younger brothers, but no older siblings at all. There were fifty-five women she called ‘Mother’, but she had only one father.

“The Poison
Catastrophe
of the previous generation was a man. In order to increase the number of humans with enormous sensory organs, he copulated with women all over the world, and sired many children. They are all here - one-hundred-and-forty-three humans with huge sensory organs. I used God Mushi Emperor to gather the capacity of all these organs, and transplanted them into my body.”

There were girls crying and screaming, boys with smiles on their faces, youths who muttered crazed words under their breath, and babies who rolled their eyes in a comatose state.

They were all Breaksun’s siblings - they were humans born and bred with no other purpose but to be storage space for Apples.

“There are also people amongst these humans who can store an incredible amount of energy within them after receiving a Greater Fragment. The eldest daughter of the previous Poison
Catastrophe
, Breaksun Hanselmine, was especially named ‘Lovesong’. As Poison
Catastrophe
is capable of twisting cause and effect and hiding her presence, all the fragments we have ever gathered from all over the world throughout these centuries were all combined together and kept within her body.”

“You - “

Kajiri muttered as if moaning. He took a firm hold of his crucifix knife and threatened Joker. A flaming rage dominated Kajiri's eyes. Ahaha - Joker thought as she readjusted her position. Her previously relaxed expression also disappeared. Damn. She liked to talk too much and overdid it this time, and finally caused her enemies to react strongly.

Maybe she was too excited in her first real battle.

Kajiri gritted his teeth and roared angrily: "What are you talking about! Go get Fragments yourself! All this talk about storage space - are you kidding me! Do you think everyone else is an object?"

"You!"

His anger was completely justified. Strictly speaking, it was according to justice. However, that was where it ends.

There are many, many things that cannot be saved with justice alone.

Why did her chest hurt slightly? She must have talked too much and overexerted her lung capacity.

"You took away everyone else's lives just so you could keep on living - have you never considered whether that was correct? Are you really a human?"

"You are the stupid one. Are you really planning on becoming a human?"

Justice. Morality. Those things that made one get upset for another's sake. Those things were pushing Kajiri to act right now. Those beautiful and brilliant emotions were in fact all foolish and worthless trash. No matter how much of those emotions one possessed, that will never help anyone to achieve their goals, but will instead cause them to lose their lives by putting them in danger.

Foolish. So foolish. So incorrigibly foolish.

A teardrop flew from of Joker's eye.

"…?"

Joker cried often, but she never quite understood why she cried.

She should be correct. She should be living in a way more justified than anyone else.

So why was she so sad?

“Petrify!”

All five of Kajiri’s senses should have been robbed from him according to her command, but he did not stop. Instead, he rushed towards her. He should be able to see and hear nothing. Was he not scared? Was he not scared to be placed into that death-like emptiness?

“Grr…”

Kajiri rushed towards her without caring for his own wellbeing. Joker was slightly afraid, and all the human faces on her body started to scream. She had absorbed the power of her Fragment, and her physical power had received an exponential increase. Even if she didn’t use Crushing Space, she could still easily kill somebody. She thought this, and stretched her hand towards the other without defending.

Suddenly, Joker genuinely felt incredulous at the situation, and lowered her head.

“What is this – I am fighting?!”

She could not remember her goals, her reasons, her thoughts, or her desires – ahh, but she felt everything was frustrating.

Why was she in so much pain?

Innumerable lives from others were buried within her body. She had to carry all this with her and keep fighting, and keep living.

Was it because she was afraid? What was she afraid of –

“… Calm down. I’m just trying to keep living.”

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
murmured in a low voice and struck out with her right arm, covered with human faces, knocking Kajiri’s body away without hesitation.

Melodia Noise

Tear Song
's attack was as powerful as a cannonball, and hit Kajiri's body viciously.

His body was smashed like soft tofu from his abdomen to his right shoulder. His blood, mixed with broken bones and flesh, fluttered in the night school grounds.

Kajiri's body, having suddenly received such a heavy injury, rolled away like a log of corroded wood. His internal organs shattered, and his face was full of blood – but even so, he still smiled.

"Ganko, it's – up to you know."

Kajiri didn't even manage to make a sound. He simply muttered to himself as his body was filled by the power of Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's Fragment.

Single Room had the ultimate ability that could remake the world and change everything according to his thoughts.

The extent that ability could reach was everything that Kajiri's blood could touch or envelope. If his blood had the time to travel around Earth, then he can even change the movement of the planet.

Kajiri originally used his sharp crucifix to stab himself to obtain his blood.

But now he didn't need to deliberately do that anymore.

He had lost a lot of blood. The blood that spurted out from the wound Melodia Noise
Tear Song
dealt him was flying in the air, and covered everything.

"… Welcome to my room. Oh well, enjoy yourself."

The blood that spurted out from his back suddenly turned around mid-flight and Guriko, who was standing behind him, was covered in his blood.

Her entire body was dripping with blood. It was hard to even imagine she was still human. The drops of blood twirled continuously on Guriko's feet, abdomen, shoulders, and her head, as if they were creatures with independent thought. Kajiri fell heavily on the corridor after he ascertained that.

"Ahh – …"

He saw Breaksun, who was lying on the ground, in his last brief moment. His sight then dimmed rapidly. Kajiri made a low laugh: "Sorry, Breako, I might end up dead. Ganko – you better win. I can't die before I fulfil your wish… what a bother."

Kajiri moaned as his consciousness gradually left his body. The woman above her, her body covered with human faces, started a furious encounter with her fellow abomination, the red monster covered with blood.

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
and Guriko's battle ruined everything around them.

The school building was full of holes. Bricks and tiles flew in all directions, and the entire school looked like it was ready to collapse.

But Guriko was not worried at all. Her brain was ruled by her bestial, overwhelming desire to kill. Her body moved instinctively and without any thoughts.

"Gah – ahhhhh!"

Guriko roared and the fleshy wings on her back flapped. The storm they stirred up blew up the entire school building, and the corridor collapsed and broke.

"You monster…!"

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
screeched, with the bells tied to her hair started to make a shrill, piercing sound. At the same time, the human faces all over her body

started to make sad wails of despair and anguish, and the tears they shed all fluttered away.

“– Petrify!”

According to the previous situation, everything should have been finished with that final attack. No matter how powerful Guriko was after her transformation, she couldn’t have absolute confidence with beating Melodia Noise
Tear Song
once all her five senses were sealed.

However…

“Aren’t you – a monster too?!”

Guriko’s sight was still clear and bright, and her hearing was not affected. She attacked her opponent with no hesitation in her movements. Melodia Noise
Tear Song
was very surprised at this, and her movement paused briefly due to her confusion.

Of course, Guriko wouldn’t let this opportunity go.

“Die!”

Her hand was covered with armor-like carapace, but was flexible and soft contrary to appearances. The sharp claws that could easily rip apart human flesh swept past rapidly and sank into Melodia Noise
Tear Song
’s shoulder, severing her right arm from her body without any difficulty.

Her flesh was torn and blood flew everywhere. Her arm fell on the ground and rolled away.

There was a sound of blood spurting out.

“Woahhhh!”

A tragic howl tore out of Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s throat. Why hadn’t her senses disappeared? Guriko was somewhat puzzled by this, but she immediately understood this after some thinking.

It was probably because of Single Room's help.

He exhausted the last of his power not to protect himself, but to protect and modify Guriko. Due to this, even Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's ability had been rendered useless on Guriko. Her Crushing Space was also sealed off.

Kajiri had done all this to ensure victory.

Then…

"Don't underestimate me - monster!"

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, who had lost her right arm and was bleeding profusely, did not stop moving.

Her height changed as she became even shorter than Guriko. Her fist easily punched through the wall, and her shriek reverberated through the air, creating a fierce shock wave. The ancient school building finally yielded to strain placed upon it by the fierce battle between the two - the pillars holding up the corridors bent and broke, and the ground cracked beneath them.

Guriko, Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, and Breaksun, who was lying on the ground - were all tossed outside. The destruction was even worse than they imagined. Behind them, the school building collapsed in the blink of an eye and stirred up an intense dust storm. The school building complex, half-destroyed under the moonlight, looked veritably like a corpse.

"Gah - urk."

Guriko flapped her wings in the air as she slowly touched down upon the ground, her torso upright. She'd flew down from the third floor of the school building. It would be hard to imagine that Kajiri and Breaksun had escaped this unscathed - but the rubble covered everywhere and she could not see either of them.

And Melodia Noise
Tear Song
- ?

“Idiot!”

An attack suddenly came from behind her back.

She hadn’t anticipated this at all. Guriko immediately turned around and entered a fighting pose.

As opposed to erasing others’ senses - Melodia Noise Tear Song had erased her own aura with manipulation of space. Guriko realized this now, but it was too late, as broken pieces of the school building - sharp concrete blocks and sheets of iron continuously flew towards her.

“Uwahhhh!”

They pierced through the thick carapace on Guriko’s body.

Although Guriko could no longer feel pain, she still found it hard to accommodate the feeling of something alien stabbing into her body.

Guriko wobbled and fell down after the attack. Melodia Noise Tear Song, appearing right next to her, walked up with her long hair waving and her entire body laughing.

“You dare to…you dare to take off my arm…”

Melodia Noise Tear Song‘s eyes, full of rage, began to fill with blood. An ominous aura started to rise with her. Guriko instinctively felt danger. As she was about to move back, Melodia Noise Tear Song grasped her arm in the blink of an eye and tore it from her body before Guriko realized what was going on.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah!?”

Following a crunching sound, countless nerves were severed and ligaments and muscles were torn. Guriko’s only remaining arm was taken away from her.

Without either arm, Guriko stood like a column, and Melodia Noise Tear Song immediately wrapped around Guriko’s body as if the former was a

snake.

murmured: “First I’ll crush your neck, then I’ll tear apart your limbs before you die. I’ll dig out your heart, punch the rest of your body into a pulp… It would be a happy thing for you if you died before I finished with you.”

Her hands wrapped around Guriko’s head and twisted suddenly. Guriko’s neck instantly snapped. However, without her arms and being entangled like this, she was incapable of defending herself.

She flapped her wings, but it was useless.

“Gah, ah, ahhhh! Stop! Get off - !”

Guriko fell into chaos and madness and rolled on the ground. Her enemy did not cease at all, and kept holding on to Guriko’s head. Guriko made a loud roar.

“Is this your final struggle… die! Die! Die!”

The muscles on her neck creaked pitifully.

No. It was about to break.

This is scary. This is - far too scary!

Will my head get snapped off?

There was Rinne, and Sakaki, and my parents - although we only spent a small amount of time together - and Mina and Mitsuki, whom I just managed to be friends with… would my head, with all these memories, get ripped off? I hate this, hate this! I’ll be killed, I’ll be killed! My memories and soul are all going to be erased!

“Woahhhh!”

Then Guriko instinctively bit down with all her strength.

“ – Urk?”

Even though it was only for a brief second, she forcibly turned her head, which was gripped tight. The movement was too unnatural and she felt her neck was going to break.

But only for a moment, if only I can hold on for one more moment…

This was enough for her. Melodia Noise
Tear Song
was stunned at this unexpected comeback. Her face, which was right next to Guriko's in order to have a stronger hold on the latter's neck, was bitten by Guriko.

She bit her furiously.

"Waaa - aaaah!"

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's nose was inside Guriko's mouth and her cheek was bleeding. Her beautiful face was covered in blood.

Her power weakened briefly, and Guriko struggled free from her grasp. Guriko was acting out of sheer impulse as she thought of this terrifying tactic and implemented it.

She pushed down Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, whose eyes seemed to spurt fire in rage and madness. She opened her mouth wide and her teeth bit down tightly. It was a terrifying action that Guriko would never have done previously.

"Ah? What - ah, ah, aaahhhh!?"

She bit her.

She bit down on her arms, shoulders, and throat. She bit down and tore at Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's body, chewed her enemy's flesh, and swallowed it.

The numerous unfortunate children swept into this affair, those failed 'Lovesongs' serving as storage space, made vengeful screeches, but Guriko ignored them.

This was the only thing she could do.

This was the only thing she could do in order to win.

"Waahhhhhh - eat, eat, eat me ahhhhhhhhhhhh aaahhhhhh?!"

Melodia Noise

Tear Song
wriggled her body and spasmed from the severe pain, and her body cried out. But Guriko paid this no mind. She bit down
on Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s arms, tore at her abdomen, sucked on her organs, greedily devored her soft bosom, gnawed at her blood-covered face, and a smile surfaced on Guriko’s countenance. Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s entire body was a storage space keeping the excess power of Fragments. Then she just needed to keep eating and absorbing it, and make that power into her own. It was simple. She didn’t even need to think. That was Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s weakness.

“Ahh - uhhhh.”

She pierced the protective layer of air and reached out
for Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s tender flesh. If the other woman struggled, then she simply exerted more force and pushed her down harder. She ignored the piercing screams, and gave in to the instinctual madness.

She smashed the hand that tried to escape, pulled out the quivering organs, gouged out the eyeballs murky with fear and ate them up.

It was bursting out. This vitality was filling her up until it burst out. With every piece of meat that entered her stomach, more of the unbelievable power swelled up. *This feels so good.* Guriko immersed herself in this primeval joy. She was laughing. Somewhere deep in Guriko’s heart, she thought this was how it was meant to be, this was what she was made to do. It was as if she finally understood what she was doing. Why did she always use spoons to gouge out others’ eyes? That was because spoons are cutlery, and were only aimed towards food. Had she considered all the opponents she had ever faced food? Was that why she felt so satisfied to actually start eating them?

“Ha - ha, hahahaha!”

She laughed. Although it was a senseless way of thinking, it was as if now, she could finally understand. Yes, this was the right thing. She felt great to eat her opponents up like this.

The chilling moment continued. No one could stop it now. Guriko ceased thinking. She simply ate joyfully and continuously, despite the wailing and cries that were coming out of Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's entire body, a sound akin to a maddened song. The noble action of 'fighting' had long since ended in this place. What had taken its place was predation. The foaming flood flew out under the moonlight, and its shadows kept roiling.

She pulled out her enemy's bones, bit down on arteries, and tore apart her nerves.

She ravaged her opponent's body as she wished. Guriko was feeling very delighted to watch Melodia Noise
Tear Song
being torn into pieces of meat.

Victory had already been decided. What she was doing now was merely punishing the loser, with a cruel, delicious feast for the winner.

Joker understood this very much, but she could not stop it. She didn't even have the power to resist, and could only emit pitiful moans.

Guriko tore her apart, dismembered her, and ate her.

"Ah - nom, nom."

A pitiful body was left behind.

"Om - guh, hah, nom!"

All the faces over Melodia Noise
Tear Song
were chewed up. They completely lost the spark of life, becoming as devoid of expression as the faces of the dead.

She lost both her arms, and all her internal organs were eaten up. Her abdomen was empty now, and her ribs were crushed and broken. And the part that was most nutritious of all - her heart – had also been dug out.

Her previously beautiful face was now displaying the flesh underneath. Her lower body, which was not bitten as badly, was suffering from the reactions of the severe pain, and the nerves were

intermittently causing the muscles to spasm strongly.

Victory had been decided.

This supremely tragic battle was finally going to end.

“…”

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
had no more will to fight. Her body was no longer able to move.

Even if she was an immortal, she couldn’t last with this kind of damage.

Her heart, her central sensory organ, was already in Guriko’s stomach. Her countless supplementary sensory organs were also mostly eaten, falling all over the place. Melodia Noise
Tear Song
would die. The power of her enormous Fragment would be taken away by Guriko. Even though she stated that the power of Fragments could not build up infinitely within a body, Guriko’s sensory organ was as a bottomless pit and swallowed it all, and gluttonously sought for even more.

“Monster…”

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
said brokenly with her remaining voice.

“Monster… Mon… ster…”

“…”

Guriko did not respond. She knew what was happening even if the other didn’t state it.

The arm that she just lost instantly grew out again due to the nutrition she had obtained. She flapped her blood-stained wings and flew in the air, and looked down upon Melodia Noise
Tear Song
. There were no emotions in her eyes. There was no gratitude from having attained victory, or any sense of guilt. Something deep within those gun-barrel like eyes dimmed even more.

“Rinne… I need to find her.”

She suddenly remembered this. Although Guriko faltered, she still moved one small step at a time. She thought Melodia Noise
Tear Song
would soon die even if she was left alone. She then shook her head. She looked at the other's woman's sole remaining beautiful blue eye. It was as if she had seen that color before.

"Gu…ryū. Ta…tsue. Ganhō…" As if Melodia Noise
Tear Song
was murmuring in her dreams, Guriko could not hear what she said clearly, and had no idea what she was talking about.

Guriko thought it was probably meaningless murmurs. She should at least finish the woman off, and end her pains. Guriko lifted up her hand.

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's entire body shook.

"I don't want to die."

Guriko's hand, clenched into a fist, froze in the air.

For some reason, she felt at a loss, and somewhat tired and empty. Guriko sighed and took her eyes off Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's body and walked forward.

Guriko didn't know where she was going, what she was looking for, or why she was alive.

"…?"

She suddenly looked up. Countless people stood around her. She didn't know any of them, but she could guess.

Those people, who had emerged from the night with their red eyes, were not staring at Guriko. They were only looking confusedly for something in the school building. As if this was the center of the world, as if innumerable things of beauty existed here.

Guriko followed their eyes and slowly looked towards the school building.

Within the only intact classroom in the broken building, Usagawa

Rinne's form could be seen.

Requiem 666

There was a faint aroma of cherry blossoms in the breeze. On an early spring afternoon, Usagawa Rinne had accidentally fallen asleep in the warm and comforting sunlight, only waking when someone shook her shoulders lightly.

“- Um. Huh?”

Rinne’s body was still slumped sideways when she was woken from her warm and comfortable dream, and she wanted nothing more than to immediately go back to sleep.

But the person next to her obstinately dragged her upright.

“Rinne, Rinne, get up!”

“Urk…”

A sound echoed softly next to her, with Rinne not understanding what was going on at all. It went on and on, until she finally couldn’t bear it anymore and sat up, having no other options.

She lifted her hands and yawned, then made a big stretch.

“Mmmmm.”

“Wasn’t that a good nap for you? You also had a good night’s sleep last night. You’ll become an idiot if you keep sleeping day after day like this.”

“Ahaha, Guriko-chan’s the last person I’d want to tell me off… You also sleep during classes without a care yourself.”

Guriko frowned as if she was upset, but immediately smiled in an outgoing way. Gankyū Eguriko was both Rinne’s roommate and classmate.

This girl, with her strange name, scratched her black and messy hair and narrowed her eyes.

“I don’t really care about it, but Sakaki was asking for you just now. He probably wants to talk to you about something. That bastard of a teacher couldn’t find you, so he told me off. He’s so full of himself. One day I’ll gouge out his eyeballs. Hmph!”

"… Sensei?" Rinne tilted her head. Her cheeks were still reddish with residual sleepiness and she looked rather cute.

The 'Sakaki' whom Guriko mentioned was named Sakaki Guryū. He was the homeroom teacher for Rinne's class, as well as her lover.

Rinne's heart would be full of warm happiness whenever she thought of him.

That familiar class in Kannonsakazaki Private High School, Class 1-B, was Rinne's homeroom.

It seemed to be already afterschool when Rinne woke up. There was no one around her except Guriko. How long had she slept for? Rinne looked at her watch, and remembered it was time for her to go to work. Which day of the week was it? Which day of which month?

"Sensei… was looking for me?"

Rinne felt a bit confused, and posed the question to Guriko. Guriko replied with displeasure all over her face. "Yep. I don't know exactly what he wants you for. That teacher was asking for 'Milady, Milady' all over the place, looking for you as if he was a lost puppy. Why don't you hurry up and find him and get him to shut up?"

And as Guriko said this -

"Milady!"

Sakaki Guryū, that blond, blue-eyed, startlingly beautiful man, pushed open the door at that moment.

He was looking everywhere for Rinne just like Guriko said. There was a sad expression on his face, and his hair was a mess.

"Ah, thank goodness. Milady, you are here! I couldn't contact you either through your home phone number or your mobile. I was so worried!"

Sakaki was shouting loudly as he walked quickly towards Rinne. He pushed Guriko aside, and embraced Rinne in his arms. Rinne was somewhat happy to feel his warmth, but at the same time she blushed over her entire face from excitement.

"Hold, hold on, Sensei… Don't! This is so embarrassing. Don't act so

exaggeratedly!" Rinne smiled and returned his embrace. When she looked towards Guriko, whose face was full of displeasure, the two girls both looked as if they thought Sakaki could be such a bother at times.

Rinne spoke softly. "It's fine. I was just having a nap. How should I say this… I had a bad dream…"

She felt the scent of blood when she woke up. It was coming both from the world and from herself.

"Ah - Huh?"

Oh? What is this? What a strange dream. Usagawa Rinne thought. She realized she was in a dark place. Her body hurt all over and her head felt heavy. *Where is Guriko? Where is Sensei? Where did they disappear off to? Where did the quiet classroom disappear off to?*

"Huh…?" Rinne really couldn't understand this and made a confused sound. This seemed to be the same place. This was still the classroom of Class 1-B in Kannonsakazaki Private High School. However, her surroundings looked as if they had been through an earthquake. All the window panes were broken, and the furniture were all upturned and scattered across the room. Even the room itself seemed to be tilted.

But there were still scribbles on the wall and she could feel nostalgia rising up. This was indeed her classroom.

"Why, why is it so dark?"

It was all a mess in front of her and she couldn't understand it. Rinne initially looked around her for anyone else. She then reached into her pocket for her phone. After coming up as negative for both, she got up and walked towards the window.

She could hear something. Some people seemed to be fighting.

"Huh… is this a dream?"

Rinne couldn't help but whimper.

Beginning with the room adjacent to hers, the school building had been severely damaged. The broken roof tiles, walls, and the shattered pieces of wooden furniture were everywhere.

What is going on?

Is this actually a nightmare?

Why am I here, smelling like blood, in the middle of the empty, ruined school?

"…?!"

Rinne pressed her palm on the broken window pane with a thump and glared outside. She saw something outlandish. A naked, white woman, with her blonde hair flying in the wind, was fighting against a gigantic monster with a red body and a pair of wings coming out of its back.

"That, is - huh, is that Guriko-chan?"

The red creature seemed to be what Guriko looked like after her metamorphosis.

Rinne had seen her like this when they fought the Dream World Beast. But why was Guriko fighting?

Rinne knew nothing about what was going on, and she couldn't understand anything.

"Are you awake, princess?"

Rinne was startled by the sudden sound. Her shoulders shook, and she turned around. A man dressed in black stood at the entrance of the classroom, He looked like a priest, but his eyes contained a hungry look like that of a wolf. The man giggled in a low voice, and sounded positively terrifying…

"You… are…"

Her throat was rather hoarse and she couldn't successfully continue her sentence. Had she not spoken for a long time? Words could not flow freely out of her mouth. Her thoughts were also fuddled, and her memories were not very reliable either.

The only thing she felt was anxiety. Rinne tried to find Sakaki as her top priority. She looked everywhere in the empty area.

“Although it’s a fickle thing to restore someone through alterations of the flesh…it seems you have already regained yourself, Usagawa Rinne-chan.”

“My…self?”

She didn’t understand what he was talking about. Also… who was he?

“Who – are you? Where is… this?”

The man ignored her questions and approached her, while looking at the fierce fighting outside the window with pleasure evident on his face. He then looked around the school building. “Mmm, the Mushi are gathering together too. Then – it’s about to begin.”

He suddenly turned around and looked at Rinne with his face full of smiles. It was very unsettling – or rather, why was she talking to something like this? Rinne couldn’t understand why she was even in this situation and she turned around, wanting to run away. She felt – scared! She felt a tinge of fear in her heart.

“You won’t get away.”

The man’s wrist stretched out and curled around Rinne’s waist, as if it ignored the laws of physics, and dragged her back. The overwhelming power made it impossible to resist. Rinne struggled in a panic, but it was useless.

Rinne was tightly wrapped up by the man, and his giant palm clamped over her mouth. She was terrified, and her entire body shook.

“Ahh, don’t worry. I’m not planning to suffocate you to death.” The man spoke lightheartedly and put pressure on Rinne’s jaw, forcing her mouth open. ”Even if I were to kill you, it would be – by drowning.”

There was an odd sound, and Rinne instantly experienced something unbelievable.

“ – Urg!”

Glug glug glug… following this odd sound, a warm liquid suddenly gurgled from the hand holding Rinne’s mouth open and was injected into her mouth. She couldn’t close her mouth, so she

couldn't stop the liquid from flowing in. She tried to vomit, wanting to throw it up – and in fact, some of the liquid came flying out of her nose.

"Ur, glug, glug, glug… Uuuuum!"

She didn't want to drink this. It was so disgusting, but she was forced to drink all this liquid. Besides – what was this…

"Uuuuum! Guuuuu!"

Rinne realized the disgusting truth. She began to wave her limbs everywhere and tried to struggle and resist. This unique metallic stench, this warmth, and this stickiness that stuck in her throat – this was blood.

She was being forced to drink blood! And copious amounts of it too!

No matter how she cried and struggled, the man did not stop. She didn't even know whose blood it was. The blood passed through Rinne's throat and filled her stomach, where it settled down with a gurgle.

"Gah! Uuuuum!"

"Don't hate it so much. The power of the Fragments
that Melodia Noise
Tear Song
collected over hundreds of years is all infused in this blood! Even I want a sip of this."

"Guuuuuuuh!"

She didn't know how much she had drunk. The blood was still going. Her stomach already feel bloated. It was so disgusting. She wanted to vomit it all back up, but she couldn't.

"Mmm - they finally finished."

The man looked outside the window, then giggled a laugh again.

In that instant, it was as if his voice and tone became someone else's. It was as if his personality changed, or an actor had stopped acting and returned to his normal self - that was how it felt.

"… Oh well. That's the best you can do, Crybaby Joker."

He laughed and giggled. He - no, that voice sounded like a woman's - laughed ominously.

Rinne didn't understand. She didn't understand anything. She just wanted to go back to Sakaki's side.

Sensei! Guriko-chan! Someone! Someone, help me!

"When the Savior is completely destroyed and the False Prophet appears, the six-hundred-and-sixty-six beasts will awake and the world will be destroyed - and humans will be destroyed again."

He seemed to be reciting the Bible, and yet seemed to be saying something incomprehensible - then the man's figure started to blur and gradually changed into different shapes…

"… Then I will become the God that destroys the world."

Hehehe, she laughed.

"Urgh - ahh, cough, cough!"

The hand was finally removed from Rinne's mouth. She started to cough and moan violently. Her stomach felt disgusting, and she wanted to vomit - she wanted to vomit everything out of her body.

"Urk, urk…"

Why do I have to suffer such a cruel treatment…?

Rinne thought this, and moved her gaze away from the scary laughing woman. She suddenly saw Guriko outside the window, who was covered in blood and also looking this way.

Behind Guriko, the six-hundred-and-sixty-six Mushi were looking this way with red, Apple-like eyes.

Author's Notes

According to the Bible, Noah seemed to be already more than 600 years old when the Great Flood happened. Moreover, the original human, Adam, appeared have lived for 903 years. Mmm - dear religious leaders, before you discuss whether it was an apple leaf or a fig leaf that covered Adam's loins, why don't you reveal the secret of longevity?

That aside -

Hello, I am Akira.

I here present the fourth volume in the Mushi to Medama series - "Mushi, Eyeballs, and Lovesong". My daily life has been very chaotic lately. I'm sleeping less, becoming picky in my diet, and my life is wearing away little by little.

"You should eat apples at such times!"

Apples in reality won't give us immortality when we eat them, but they seem to be able to cleanse the blood through anti-oxidant activities and slow down aging.

Apples are incredible fruits. The ethylene compounds they contain can speed up the aging process of plants in its vicinity, causing their flowers to wilt, their leaves to droop, or even stopping their growth altogether. It is veritably a plant killer.

Apples absorb the life force of other plants and use it to slow down human aging. It could be considered a radical in the plant world.

"Ah, how many beautiful flowers died to create this one apple… Hehehehe, they are necessary sacrifices to maintain my youth!"

Whenever I think like this when I'm eating an apple, I would feel as if I am Elizabeth Bathory.

The vampire countess Elizabeth Bathory believed in similar things as Joker in this story, with both believing they should 'rob others of their lives to prolong [their] own.' She was particularly notorious for absorbing blood, the symbol of life. It is said that Elizabeth killed countless people and bathed in the blood from 600 virgins to maintain her youth.

But we can't bathe in or absorb others' blood or eat others' hearts to prolong our own lives in reality. Don't move towards a path of perverted crimes, everyone.

You can't gouge out people's eyeballs either.

Hmm, but since I wrote this story, my words on this matter aren't really convincing.

The rest of this are my acknowledgements.

I inconvenienced executive producer Satō-san again with my procrastination this time. My sincerest apologies.

I will try my best and not give you any more trouble before the final volume.

Please feel free to tell me off if I start to get lazy again.

Then, I have to thank Mitsuki Mouse-san, the illustrator.

I write stuff that makes scenes cringe-worthy to draw all the time, and I always add extra things in. Even so, your unique art made this work all the richer. Thank you!

I really want to show the readers that picture with faces all over Joker's body…

Ah, right. The manga version of "Mushi to Medama" has started being serialized on Monthly Comic Alive.

I would like to thank the manga artist Asami Yuriko-san, and the original executive producer Kindaichi-san for giving this series the chance to go into different forms of media.

We will reach the final volume soon. No matter what, please stay with me till the end, everyone.

Akira

Translator's Notes and References

Kirigirisu: This name literally means 'cricket', as the insect. For more information on crickets in Japanese culture, see here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crickets_as_pets#Pet_crickets_in_Japan. Return to Text

Kudan: One of rarest mythological creatures in Japanese myth, Kudan is a calf born with a human head and made prophesies about the end of the world, and dies three days after these prophesies are made. Not to be confused with Hakutaku, a similar mythological creature with nine eyes (although the author had, by giving Kudan the character a third eye on her forehead, seemingly mixed her appearance up with that of the Hakutaku). More detailed explanation on the background and significance of the creature can be found in the following links http://www.rosemarybandini.co.uk/kudan-versus-hakutaku/ http://www.mythicalcreatureslist.com/mythical-creature/Kudan. Return to Text

Shinzō Ukako: This name is almost violent and un-name-like as many others in the series. Shinzō Ukako means "Heart-Eater", and here it is being compared with Gankyū Eguriko, "Eyeball-Gouger". To note, I'm not 100% sure on the Romanization. It could easily have been pronounced Shinzō Tabeko (but the meaning would be the same)! Return to Text

Nikuyama Kajiri: This name literally means "Meat-Mountain Crunchy"... Return to Text

menchikatsu: A type of meat patty with a crumble cover, a fusion food popular in Japan. For more information see here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menchi-katsu. Return to Text

FC and SFC: They are talking about the FC Twin and the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (known as SFC in Japan), which were marketed in the early 1990s. Return to Text

Credits

Mushi, Eyeball and Lovesong
Mushi to Medama #4

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